

A THEOLOGICAL AND HERMENEUTICAL UNDERSTANDING
OF THE MESSIANIC SECRET IN THE
GOSPEL OF MARK

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The dissertation "A Theological and Hermeneutical Understanding of the Messianic Secret in the Gospel of Mark" attempts to do a number of tasks. First, is the attempt to clarify the concept of the messianic secret as initially stated by William Wrede. Once Wrede's position is delineated the focus is directed to the response of 15 scholars (ranging from Schweitzer to Perrin) with an attempt by the author to set forth a contemporary understanding of the secret. With the historical background completed the secret is put in context with the whole of Mark and its strong emphasis on the theology of the cross.

With the above foundation established the attention of the dissertation turns to the implications for preaching. How does this understanding of the secret and Mark as a whole relate to the preaching process? Attention is given specifically to exegesis, application of the meaning of the theme to contemporary life, and "whole gospel preaching." By "whole gospel" the students of K. Morgan Edwards at the School of Theology at Claremont, California, understand it essential to include in the sermon emphasis on grace, judgment and obedience.

Two sermons are included in this work to demonstrate how the above theological and exegetical background can become the preached word. The first sermon is based on the transfiguration account. Though this is not strictly speaking a secret passage, it is an integral element of Mark's theme presentation and does demonstrate the intention of the secret theme. The second sermon is based on the confession of Peter which is a secret passage.

The method used was basic historical research, broad exposure to works on New Testament theology, exegesis and finally the creation of two sermons to demonstrate the application of the background work. The result is a work that does provide a theological and hermeneutical understanding for Mark's messianic secret theme. The most important outcome being an application of an important biblical theme to contemporary life.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this dissertation is twofold: First, to establish a basis for understanding the messianic secret theme in the Gospel of Mark, and, second, using that basis to demonstrate how one might preach on the "secret" passages.

The idea for such an undertaking was conceived when the writer participated in a course on the Gospel of Mark during the Fall semester of 1971 at the School of Theology at Claremont. This introduction to Mark stimulated the writer's interest in this the earliest gospel, and specifically in those sections that have come to be known as the messianic secret passages. What is the origin of the "secret" concept? How did it develop so soon after the death of Jesus?¹ If Mark did not create the theme himself, why did he feel it necessary to include it in his gospel?

In addition to this new-found interest in Mark, a primary area of interest to the writer has long been the proclamation of the gospel message. The necessity of transforming first century communication into a lively word for twentieth century is of special concern here. Thus the wedding of these two interests was a natural for a

¹Paul Feine, Johannes Behm, and Werner Georg Kümmel, *Introduction to the New Testament* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1966), p. 71. Most critical scholars agree with Feine, Behm and Kümmel that Mark was written around A.D. 70.

dissertation topic.

What is this "messianic secret"? In reading the Gospel of Mark one finds a peculiar situation depicted by the gospel writer when Jesus performs a miraculous work. An example of this situation occurs as early as 1:23f.:

And immediately there was in their synagogue a man with an unclean spirit; and he cried out, 'What have you to do with us, Jesus of Nazareth? Have you come to destroy us? I know who you are, the Holy One of God.'

But Jesus rebuked him, saying, 'Be silent, and come out of him!'

Jesus attempts to silence those who would identify him as the Messiah. In this case it is the "unclean spirit." The spirit calls Jesus the "Holy One of God" and because of that statement Jesus commands him, "Be silent." Such attempts to silence messianic confessions by unclean spirits or demons constitutes one category of material that makes up the messianic secret. There are three other categories which round out what Wrede defines as the messianic secret: (1) Jesus' command to those healed to seal their lips with regard to their healing; (2) Jesus' secret instruction to his disciples, and (3) the disciples' failure to understand Jesus.

Significant in content and significant in number are the passages that fall into the messianic secret categories in the Markan account. Thus, if the preacher is to use a Markan text (whether directly a "secret" passage or not) he needs an acquaintance with this theme. This type of acquaintance, one which will be useful to the preacher, is attempted in this dissertation.

The manner of attempting such an acquaintance will first

center on research published heretofore.

The German scholar, William Wrede, published in 1901 *Das Messiasgeheimnis in den Evangelien*. In his preface to this work Wrede states,

For some time my particular attention has been claimed by the *Gospel tradition of Jesus as the Messiah*. It has been engaged, as I might also put it, by *whether Jesus saw himself as Messiah* and so represented himself.²

Thus, critical scholarship began its yet continuing discussion of Jesus' consciousness of his messiahship. It was Wrede who coined the term "messianic secret," so it is with Wrede that this study will begin.

Following the consideration of Wrede's position, the responses which that position aroused will be considered and the current understanding of the theme along with the writer's own appraisal will be delineated. This will then be the manner in which the concept of the messianic secret will be covered.

The third chapter will deal with the relationship of the messianic secret to the whole of Mark's gospel. Herein will be a consideration of the theological significance of the "secret." Following that will be an appraisal of the understanding of Mark as a passion narrative with its primary purpose being the setting forth of a theology of the cross. Concluding the chapter will be an examination of the relationship between the messianic secret and the theology

²William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (London: Clarke, 1971), p. 1. Emphasis his.

of the cross.

The fourth chapter will then attempt to elucidate the implications the concept of the messianic secret and its relation to the whole of Mark have on preaching the "secret" passages. These implications will be categorized into three areas: First, those implications that bear influence on the exegetical process in relation to sermon preparation; second, those implications arising from the *sitz im leben* perceived by the redactor Mark which shed light on those situations in the local church or community where the sermon will be proclaimed; and third, the implications this research brings to "whole gospel" preaching, or in other words, the necessity of each sermon to deal with grace, judgment and obedience.

Chapter five will be composed of two sermons based on selected messianic secret passages to serve as models for what the writer is attempting in the entire dissertation. Also in this chapter will be a series of critical remarks appended to each sermon to help contextualize the proclamation process.

The dissertation will conclude with observations by the writer gained through the process of research and writing. It is the writer's hope that the process of composing the dissertation will be an experience of practical value.

Chapter 2

THE CONCEPT OF THE MESSIANIC SECRET

The purpose of this chapter is to present Mark's concept of the messianic secret as developed by William Wrede. This will be done by summarizing his book *The Messianic Secret* so the reader will not only be aware of Wrede's conclusions, but hopefully how he arrived at those conclusions. Responses by other critical scholars to Wrede's position will comprise the second section of the chapter. This process will enable the reader to determine how Wrede's position has fared over the years. Finally, a survey of the current status of the "secret" will be included as well as the writer's own thinking on the subject.

WILLIAM WREDE

Some Preliminaries on the General Picture of the Messianic History of Jesus

Wrede commences his study of Mark with a survey of the Markan course of events, which he entitles "Some Preliminaries on the General Picture of the Messianic History of Jesus."¹ As a starting point, Wrede details what he calls " . . . the picture of the messianic life of Jesus which the prevailing critical view finds outlined in the

¹William Wrede, *The Messianic Secret* (London: Clarke, 1971), pp. 11ff.

Gospel of Mark . . ."² This view sees Jesus, on the one hand, trying to keep his messianic identity concealed, while on the other hand, that identity is becoming more and more public. Wrede does not agree with this "prevailing critical view": "First of all it is clear that in Mark a lot of things have to be read between the lines if we want to establish that in it there is a really comprehensible development."³ Wrede's opposition sees Jesus' lack of explanations to his disciples about his true nature as Jesus' attempt to let them come to the right attitude towards him on their own. Wrede sees no basis for this in the text. Also there is no motive indicated in the text for Jesus' continued injunctions to silence concerning his identity and miracles as there is no motive for keeping his identity secret from the people after Caesarea Philippi. Wrede points out that his opposition's belief that Jesus is hinting at his coming suffering and death in order to cleanse the disciples of Jewish concepts is unfounded in the Markan text as well.

Wrede goes on to point out, "It is of even greater concern that just where a connection between certain themes would be extremely necessary this is lacking."⁴ As an example of this lack of connection, he points out that after the second feeding the disciples still do not understand Jesus as evidenced by their misinterpretation of his reference to the leaven of the Pharisees in 8:15, yet suddenly in 8:27ff. they have great insight into this saying. Also, how does the blind

²Wrede, p. 12.

³Wrede, p. 15.

⁴Wrede, p. 15.

man of Jericho know Jesus as the Son of David, and immediately afterwards the crowd at Jerusalem know him as the Messiah? Wrede's conclusion to all this is, "The narrative does not look like an intentional record of messianic developments."⁵

In substantiating the lack of messianic development, Wrede continues by pointing out that though Jesus commands the sick to keep the fact of their healing a secret, nevertheless he performs the miracles in public. Public miracles begin as early as 2:1ff. and continue as late as 5:43, 7:36, and 8:26.⁶

Wrede also points out that at the raising of Jairus' daughter (5:35ff.) the crowd is not allowed to view the miracle, but Jesus' confidants are permitted to be present. He sees this as a contradiction to the view that not until Peter's confession did Jesus reveal himself to the disciples, but only prepared them for recognition of him through his teaching.

Most important to Wrede in his attempt to establish a new approach to Mark are the self-designations of Jesus as "Son of man" in 2:10 and 2:28. "If 'Son of man' means Messiah, then according to Mark Jesus designated himself as such long before Peter's confession, and in the full glare of publicity at that."⁷ Those who are in opposition to Wrede's view claim section 2:1-3:6 has a clear topical not chronological arrangement. They call it an "erratic block" not typical of Mark and thus feel it does not contradict the late

⁵Wrede, p. 16.

⁶Wrede, p. 17.

⁷Wrede, p. 18.

recognition of the Messiah by the disciples. However, this is exactly what Wrede is contending: Mark's order is other than historical. There is no development from ignorance to understanding.

Wrede finds two other passages helpful to his understanding: First, 3:27: "But no one can enter a strong man's house and plunder his goods, unless he first binds the strong man; then indeed he may plunder his house." There is no messianic title here but Wrede sees the statement as a strong indication by Jesus as to his nature. A nature the hearer would understand as messianic. Second, the bridegroom of 2:19-20 is, as Mark uses it, a messianic designation and a "prophecy of the Passion."⁸ All of these observations enable Wrede to conclude, " . . . just as much by what he does not say as by a series of definite statements, Mark shows he was unaware of the view of history ascribed to him."⁹ Mark's purpose in writing was not to present a life of Jesus or to show a development of messianic recognition. With this conclusion, Wrede finishes the "preliminaries" and is ready to move on.

The Self-Concealment of the Messiah

At this point Wrede takes up Mark's presentation of Jesus as one who does not want his true nature known. Of first importance in a critical study of Mark's Jesus, according to Wrede, is to consider Jesus' commands to silence. Within that context, most important is

⁸Wrede, p. 21.

⁹Wrede, p. 22.

the consideration of Jesus' relations with the demons for they are the ones, the only ones, who have the capacity to recognize Jesus as Messiah and address him as such.¹⁰ Wrede goes into some detail to discount the historicity of the demon confrontations, ending with the conclusion that they have no historical basis in the life of Jesus of Nazareth.¹¹ Why then are they a part of Mark's account? In these passages, where Jesus and the demons come face to face, Mark makes it clear that it is the demons, not the human beings they inhabit, that recognize Jesus. Here Jesus is recognized by supernatural beings: "Spirit comprehends spirit, and only spirit can do so."¹² For it is not the human Jesus they see but a Jesus with *pneuma*: the Son of God. Thus, while in general Jesus is not recognized by his disciples who spend much time with him, see him at work and hear him teach, nor is he recognized by the "people"; he is recognized by these spirits. To most his messiahship is hidden, but not to the spirits: Jesus is known and recognized as the Messiah. The role of the demons is to validate to the reader that Jesus is the Messiah even though such is secret knowledge.

Having thus considered the demon's recognition of Jesus as the Messiah, Wrede moves on to the injunctions to keep the messianic secret. These injunctions to silence are categorized as follows:

¹⁰Wrede, p. 24. Those passages of special importance to Wrede at this point are 1:23-25, 1:34, 3:11f., 5:6, and 9:20.

¹¹Wrede, p. 33.

¹²Wrede, p. 25.

1. Prohibitions addressed to the demons: 1:25, 1:34, and 3:12.
2. Prohibitions following (other) miracles: 1:43-45, 5:43, 7:36, and 8:26.
3. Prohibitions after Peter's confession: 8:30 and 9:9.
4. Intentional preservation of his incognito: 7:24 and 9:30f.
5. A prohibition to speak which did not originate with Jesus: 10:47f.¹³

Wrede sees in all of these prohibitions two characteristics which are instructive to the reader: First, the commands are sharp and definite; the use of the word *epitiman* which gives the sense of scolding or severe rebuke, use of the *polla* which indicates emphatic admonition, and in the story of the leper, *embrimesamenos*, anger;¹⁴ second, the lack of expressed motives for these instructions.¹⁵ Wrede acknowledges that other scholars have proposed many motives for the various injunctions but none is acceptable to him:

If one contemplates the particular and general explanations offered, an extremely variegated picture is disclosed. This does not exclude the possibility that *one* of them is the right one, but it can also mean that no understanding at all has been arrived at.¹⁶

Wrede notes that the continuous repetition of the commands to silence as well as no indications of motivation would lead one to

¹³Wrede, pp. 34-36.

¹⁴Wrede, p. 37, the translations are all Wrede's.

¹⁵The possible exception to this is 9:30 where Jesus' wish to travel unknown through Galilee may be attributed to his wish to teach the disciples about his passion.

¹⁶Wrede, p. 37, emphasis his.

think that all the commands have the "same sense."¹⁷ Thus, he calls for an explanation that would serve for all. He states that an explanation that can illuminate only one passage or one type of passage is not sufficient. The following such explanations are systematically considered and rejected: 1. The demons are prohibited because of the undesirability or unacceptability of recognition by unclean mouths. 2. Certain prohibitions are given because of the geographical location or other types of situations in which Jesus finds himself. 3. Prohibitions given because Jesus did not want so many of his miracles discussed. 4. Jesus prohibited others from speaking because he was not sure of himself. 5. Prohibitions arising out of Jesus' wish to reeducate both his disciples and the people on the understanding of "Messiah." 6. Prohibitions arising out of Jesus' fear of Roman attempts on his life if they were to find out his messiahship.¹⁸

Wrede then states:

We now summarise the results of these observations. Exegetes have been unable to explain Jesus' command, which was repeated again and again up to the very last, to keep silent about his messianic dignity. For they have not been able to find a likely *motivation* which is conceivable for the historical Jesus and which can be applied to all the individual situations.¹⁹

At this point Wrede proposes a solution. If it is unlikely that a solution is possible in the context of the historical life of Jesus perhaps we can consider the commands as unhistorical. This Wrede does.

His line of reasoning to establish the unhistorical nature of

¹⁷Wrede, p. 37.

¹⁸Wrede, pp. 37-48.

¹⁹Wrede, p. 48.

the prohibitions is composed of four points. First, if the demons did not speak to Jesus (if we accept those encounters as unhistorical) then Jesus cannot have resisted their recognition. Second, if Jesus himself understood his miracles as signs of his messiahship, then he cannot have been so amazed at the conclusion that he was the messiah. Or, if Jesus did not consider the miracles as signs of his messiahship, then there is no need for him to silence the people. Third, the miracle stories which contain these prohibitions are themselves a bit unusual. An example is the raising of Jairus' daughter. The death of the girl is known because the mourning has begun. It is true that Jesus brings her back to life with only a few witnesses present, but how is the miracle to be concealed from the people? Sooner or later they are going to see the girl alive. What else can they assume than that Jesus, who was brought in because he was known as a wonder-worker, was the one who brought her back to life? Fourth, Mark asserts that Jesus kept quiet although he knew he was the Messiah. Where does Mark get this information if Jesus does not speak of it? Does it come from the disciples? It could be that they witnessed the prohibitions, then we could assume they knew why Jesus spoke such, that he was the messiah; but if that is the case then why are they pictured as so lacking in understanding? What meaning does Peter's confession have if they knew of Jesus' nature all along? The command given at the Transfiguration is also suspect. The historical nature of the story itself is questioned and especially the words of Jesus so closely related to a statement foretelling his resurrection.²⁰

²⁰Wrede, pp. 49-53.

Wrede's conclusion is that the prohibitions are not historical, that, like the statements of recognition by the demons, they are Mark's creation.

At this point Wrede moves to a consideration of Mark's understanding of Jesus' use of parables. Wrede bases this consideration on the parable of the sower in 4:10-13 and the concluding statement of the entire *pericope* in 4:33: "With many such parables he spoke the word to them [the people], as they were able to hear it; he did not speak to them without a parable, but privately to his own disciples he explained everything." Wrede's conclusion from this is that Jesus is presented as veiling himself from the people by his method of teaching. The parable as a teaching tool becomes a foil to the people in general. Wrede states, "It clearly follows that the expression *parabolē* is entirely equivalent to 'riddle' for Mark."²¹ However, in contrast to the people who do not understand the parables and are left to their ignorance, the disciples get the parables explained to them. The message of the parables is *to mustērion tēs basileias tou theou*. Just what that "mystery" or "secret" is, is not important at this point. What is important is that it is explained to some and concealed from others. This understanding of the use of parables is unusual to say the least. It certainly runs counter to their use in the other gospels and to their very nature of presenting items in a concrete, understandable, or verifiable manner. Wrede concludes, "Mark's report on Jesus' teaching in parables is completely unhistorical . . ."²² Wrede sees

²¹Wrede, p. 57.

²²Wrede, p. 62.

Mark's creativity at work here in much the same manner as with the recognition of the demons and the injunctions to silence. Mark wants to end up saying the secret has been given to the disciples and concealed from the people. The foundation he lays in order to get to that point is to have Jesus speak in parables to the people, parables which they fail to understand, while he later explains the parables to his disciples. The idea of secrecy is furthered in that Mark has the explanations of the parables offered either when Jesus is alone with the disciples (4:10) or when he leaves the people and goes into a house (7:17).²³

Having laid the foregoing as groundwork, Wrede turns to considering the secret itself. He states point blank:

. . . during his earthly life Jesus' messiahship is absolutely a secret and is supposed to be such; no one apart from the confidants of Jesus is supposed to learn about it; with the resurrection, however, its disclosure ensues.

This is in fact the crucial idea, the underlying point of Mark's entire approach.²⁴

Wrede sees the Transfiguration passage as a key to this understanding. In 9:9 the text reads, "And as they were coming down the mountain, he

²³Wrede notes (pp. 55ff.) that at the raising of Jairus' daughter and the Transfiguration Jesus takes only his three closest disciples with him. Does this have something to do with the secrecy motif? Those same three are also with him in Gethsemane. When he heals Peter's wife's mother two pairs of brothers go with him. Also the eschatological discourse is given to Peter, James, John and Andrew in private. Wrede comes to no decisions about all this but he does see secrecy here and feels it is somehow related to the situations where Jesus went into a house or waited until the people left before giving his parable expositions.

²⁴Wrede, p. 68.

charged them to tell no one what they had seen, *until the Son of man should have risen from the dead.*"²⁵ What they had seen, (Wrede includes within that "seeing" also what they heard as the heavenly voice said "this is my beloved son, listen to him,") deals with the messiahship. Therefore, here in the Transfiguration story the reader is told that the secret will be known after the resurrection. At that time the full nature of Jesus' messiahship will be known.

Wrede develops a parallel between this approach to the Transfiguration account and 4:21f. where Jesus says, "Is a lamp brought in to be put under a bushel, or under a bed, and not on a stand? For there is nothing hid, except to be made manifest; nor is anything secret, except to come to light." Wrede sees here a reference to the idea that something secret is imparted in the parables. This secret is given now to the disciples but after the resurrection will be for all. Thus the secret is only a secret for a while.²⁶

As groundwork to explain the nature of the secret, Wrede goes back to the baptism account in Mark. He views what happened in this account as objective fact: A supernatural event took place, the Spirit of God came into Jesus at that point. This fact is then reaffirmed in the Transfiguration account, the supernatural nature of Jesus is reaffirmed by the heavenly voice. This understanding is substantiated, according to Wrede, in the account of Jesus before the High Priest. Jesus here acknowledges he is the Son of God and then is accused of

²⁵Emphasis Wrede's.

²⁶Wrede, p. 71.

blasphemy. Yet blasphemy is only the cursing or slandering of the name of God. In light of this, the mere claim to messiahship, in the Jewish understanding, does not amount to blasphemy. However, if "Son of God" is understood in a supernatural, metaphysical sense, then the accusation of blasphemy is appropriate, for that is a claim of equality with God. This is Mark's understanding of the nature of Jesus and the sense he gives it as he puts these words in the mouth of the High Priest. Further support for a supernatural understanding of Jesus is seen in the confession of the centurion, "Truly this man was the son of God" (15:39). "Mark manifestly simply wanted to say that this centurion was obliged to acknowledge the truth of the Christian faith about Jesus and to testify to this truth under the impact of the facts."²⁷ Wrede sees a Markan theme developing around the idea that Jesus is a supernatural being, the Son of God. He then goes back to a consideration of Peter's confession in the Transfiguration account. For Mark, "Messiah," "Christ," and "Son of God" all have supernatural meaning. Thus, Peter's knowledge has been given to him for such knowledge is beyond the capabilities of human thought. Mark says in 4:11, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God." The supernatural nature of Jesus is this secret, and knowledge of that nature has to be given, for it is not within the power of the human mind to develop such a thought.

A similar idea is found by Wrede in Mark's statement of 1:22,

²⁷Wrede, p. 76.

"he taught them as one who had authority." Wrede accepts Volkmar's paraphrase of *hōs exousian echōn* as "like someone in whom a supernatural *divine* or demonic power dwells."²⁸

In summing up his discussion to this point Wrede states that the nature of Jesus is a secret. It is not only a secret because Jesus wishes it to be so, but it is an objective secret. Its very supernaturalness puts it beyond man's understanding. Why this secret has to remain a secret has not been dealt with; all Wrede wants to say to this point is, " . . . the concealment of the messiahship in Mark is accompanied by a theological, non-historical view of the messiahship, . . . and gains a particular meaning as a result of this view."²⁹

Wrede then defines the content of the "secret":

Secret is in the first place the messiahship of Jesus or his being Son of God.

Secret is the wonder-working which is the characteristic of messiahship and would betray it.

Secret is the whole teaching of Jesus because it is completely hidden from the crowd.

Secret in particular is the meaning of the parables, as it is only disclosed to the disciples, and even to them not without interpretation.³⁰

Concealment Despite Revelation

In spite of the efforts of Jesus to maintain as secret his true nature, some revealing does occur as recorded in the Markan account. Yet it appears that in spite of these revelations, the nature of Jesus

²⁸Wrede, p. 79, emphasis Wrede's.

²⁹Wrede, p. 80.

³⁰Wrede, p. 80.

is still concealed. Primary examples of such situations are the prophecies of suffering, death and resurrection.

The necessity of death is established early in Mark's account as is evidenced by the reference to the mourning on the departure of the bridegroom (2:19, 20). Mark also includes in his account the historical item of the hostility of the Pharisees and the popular leaders toward Jesus. From this item Wrede concludes that Mark saw Jesus as one who, knowing the certainty of his own death and having a desire to die in Jerusalem, chose to go there in the light of that knowledge. The forecasts which Jesus gives about his own death are so accurate that Wrede concludes they are a part of Jesus' supernatural knowledge.³¹ Since this knowledge is supernatural, its content is secret, beyond comprehension by the disciples. The early Christian community, according to Wrede, had a strong belief that Jesus not only suffered but that he willed his suffering. Thus, Wrede sees these suffering, death, and resurrection passages as a part of the early Christians' apologetics since Jesus here had a detailed foreknowledge of his passion. After examining a number of secondary additions to various key passages in the Gospels, Wrede states that these additions which came after Mark could just as easily have come before him as well. Thus, what we have recorded in Mark concerning these statements of suffering, death, and resurrection is the community's view and nothing else. It was Mark who placed the prophecies in connection

³¹Wrede, p. 84.

with the confession of Peter, the journey through Galilee, or the departure for Jerusalem.³²

What is the attitude of the disciples toward these prophecies? Wrede discounts the idea that the disciples are "slow." He states plainly that they do not understand the sayings of Jesus, and yet Jesus' statements are so clear, how can they be misunderstood? Wrede solves this riddle by saying the statements by Jesus are not historical:

Jesus does not indeed *make* a secret of his suffering and resurrection with his disciples, but it *remains* a secret to them.

. . . This trait becomes meaningful and reasonable in Mark's sense, for that human beings should be stumped at the proclamation of a supernatural secret is quite in order if otherwise they are not yet *supposed* to comprehend.³³

The disciples lack understanding not because of Jesus' inability to speak with clarity, but because they are not yet supposed to know the secret. Wrede demonstrates this position by dealing with 10:32 and 8:32f. In 10:32 Mark has Jesus "walking ahead" on the way to Jerusalem. Wrede interprets this to mean that Jesus goes to his death with courage and will. The disciples, described as "afraid" do not understand the necessity of Jesus' actions. In 8:32 where Peter rebukes Jesus for a "plainly" stated prophecy the indication is not that Peter's love of Jesus causes him to express this concern for his well-being; rather, Peter does not know the true nature of Jesus' messiahship. This knowledge is yet hidden from him. Wrede sees

³²Wrede, p. 92.

³³Wrede, p. 95.

Mark's account characterized in this way: With each presentation of a prophecy there is a corresponding lack of comprehension on the part of the disciples.³⁴

Wrede does not stop his investigation of the disciples' understanding at this point. He contends that throughout Mark's account they are incapable of understanding Jesus.³⁵ Wrede recognizes that others have found a progression of understanding on the part of the disciples, but he does not see it. That progression is: First, a general lack of understanding; second, understanding Jesus as the messiah (8:27ff.); and third, the inability to understand the suffering nature of his messiahship. In contrast, Wrede states, " . . . the Gospel of Mark exhibits nothing in the way of progress in the understanding of the disciples."³⁶ To substantiate his position he accuses other scholars as having brought individual interpretations to each account. Wrede contends that there must be one understanding for all references to a given theme. One of the positions taken by previous scholars is that the idea of a suffering messiah was just too foreign to be comprehended by the disciples. Wrede finds no reference to this concept in Mark, only that the disciples were unable to understand Jesus' sayings.

³⁴Wrede, p. 100.

³⁵Wrede bases this statement on the following passages: 4:13; 4:40, 41; 6:50-52; 7:18; 8:16-21; 9:5f.; 9:19; 10:24; 14:37-41.

³⁶Wrede, p. 107.

A correlation to Mark's emphasis on the disciples' lack of understanding is that they are continually the receivers of revelation. The disciples are steady companions of Jesus and thus witnesses of his self-manifestation in deed and word. Wrede sees a summary statement of this position in Mark 4:11: "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God . . ." Yet in spite of this steady revelation, they fail to understand the nature of Jesus. Wrede summarizes:

. . . disciples of the kind presented to us here by Mark are not real figures--disciples who never become any wiser about Jesus after all the wonderful things they see about him--confidants who have no confidence in him and who stand over against him fearfully as before an uncanny enigma and apprehensively discuss his nature among themselves behind his back.³⁷

Wrede's conclusion from this endeavor is that the lack of understanding is not because the nature of Jesus is not being revealed. Revelation is a constant process, but what is being revealed is beyond the capabilities of the disciples' human minds to grasp. Wrede sees these revelations as latent knowledge that will gain meaning after the resurrection.³⁸

Before going on the writer feels it is necessary to summarize what has been covered to this point. Wrede is concerned to show the reader that Mark saw Jesus as the messiah, a supernatural being, the Son of God. Jesus, for some reason not yet known, wishes to keep his nature a secret. Through the recognition of Jesus by the demons the reader learns who Jesus is, but the disciples and people do not. In his teaching in general, and the use of parables in particular,

³⁷Wrede, p. 103.

³⁸Wrede, p. 112.

Jesus reveals himself to his disciples but conceals himself from the people. Yet still his disciples do not understand, for it is not yet time for them to understand. As the revelations continue in the prophecies about his suffering, death and resurrection, the reader learns more about the real nature of Jesus but the disciples do not understand. This knowledge remains with them, and the reader is told will be understood by them after the resurrection.

Mark in Retrospect

Having come this far, Wrede pauses and goes back to cover four items as a summary of his study of Mark. The first of those items with which he deals is Peter's confession.

Wrede sees in the account of the confession of Peter Mark's typical style. With the exception of the introduction, this story is like the stories involving the demons. There are two motifs present. First, an accurate declaration as to who Jesus is, and second, Jesus' immediate intervention to stop the spreading of that declaration. Throughout the gospel Jesus is proclaimed. At some stages the proclaimers are demons, at another stage a voice from heaven; here it happens to be a disciple. Who the proclaimer is, is not the main concern; what is proclaimed is the important consideration. Consequently, in this account of Peter's confession what is important is not an event in the life of the disciples, but a declaration of who Jesus is which yet cannot be in public.³⁹

³⁹Wrede, p. 119.

Wrede does not see the location of this confession story as being important. Critical scholarship before him thought this account to be a turning point in the Gospel, yet Wrede claims it could be placed anywhere in the narrative. The secret is the same throughout the life of Jesus; this story does not change that at all. The disciples still have the same relationship to the secret after this account as before; therefore, a change in order would do nothing. " . . . the historical consciousness of the evangelist would not take any offense at such a change in order because his theological consciousness would permit it."⁴⁰

The second item Wrede deals with in this summary is the presence of contradictions in the Gospel. Though the contradictions are numerous and varied, those of importance fall into one theme. The nature and activity of Jesus is known and broadcast while Jesus is trying to conceal it. Mark's interest is not in presenting an account of what happened to Jesus, but in showing his life as one full of messianic manifestations. As Mark worked with this purpose in mind he reported two types of events. First, he reported internal revelations to Jesus, and second, those actions performed by Jesus that marked him as God's son. In reporting these actions of Jesus, tension developed with the desire to keep his nature secret. Wrede comments,

⁴⁰Wrede, p. 120.

Only one could always add to any revelation, as if in a sort of footnote that what Jesus did he nevertheless did in secret. The prohibitions and related features are footnotes of this kind, in which the revelations of Jesus are, so to speak, half taken back again.⁴¹

Mark's purpose is to show that Jesus was recognized, in spite of the fact that Jesus himself wanted to remain hidden.

Every confession of this kind is a *testimony* for Jesus and thereby in the eyes of narrator and reader he receives his credentials. *For this reason both are always important--the enunciation of the great truth and the prohibition of its enunciation.*⁴²

The third item of Wrede's consideration is Mark's role as an author. Wrede asserts that the Gospel of Mark belongs to the history of dogma. Mark has some of the history of Jesus before him, but his presentation is shaped by his belief. Jesus is a supernatural being with divine power and a knowledge of the future. Jesus conceals this knowledge as well as his own nature because from the beginning he is looking to the resurrection, which "is the event that will make manifest for men what is secret."⁴³ This is most definitely Mark's faith stance, and the basis for his presentation.

Wrede's fourth consideration is whether or not Mark invented the messianic secret concept. Wrede thinks not. The presentation of this idea in the Gospel of Mark is one that permeates the whole of Jesus' life and occurs with much variation. Because of the complexity of the idea at this stage it would appear not to be the work of one

⁴¹Wrede, p. 126.

⁴²Wrede, p. 128, emphasis his.

⁴³Wrede, p. 131.

person. However, the way in which Mark uses the motif of the messianic secret is certainly his own. Thus, what the reader sees in Mark is the Markan style of the messianic secret.⁴⁴

With this summary Wrede concludes his study of Mark. His next area of concern is the other Gospels as they do or do not evidence the "secret." After considering the gospels he seeks an explanation for the occurrence of the "secret" motif. It is this explanation that will be considered now.

The Origin of the "Secret"

Wrede is quick to point out that he has constantly attempted to keep separate two concepts within the "secret" motif. First, Jesus hid his messiahship, the fact that he was the Son of God, and second, Jesus was not understood by his disciples until after the resurrection. With this separation still in mind, Wrede pursues each of these in his attempt to establish the origin of the "secret" idea.

The first of these concepts, the concealment of the messiahship, is of primary importance. Wrede considers as a possible explanation the messianic idea in Judaism. In this background he finds the idea that the messiah would exist on earth in a period of concealment. During this period of concealment no one would know him until he was made manifest and his glory revealed.⁴⁵ Wrede does not see a

⁴⁴Wrede, p. 146.

⁴⁵Wrede derives this understanding of the Jewish concept from Justin's *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters 8, 110.

connection between Mark's approach and the implications of this Jewish concept.

Another possible explanation is within the tradition of the Christian community. This approach states that Jesus becomes the messiah only at the resurrection. Although this is not exactly what Mark is saying in his gospel, it is close to his statement. The concept of the messiahship beginning at the resurrection does not necessarily presuppose the idea of a concealed messiahship. One could hold this position and either see Jesus as calling himself messiah, or see the earthly Jesus not thought of as the messiah. But the idea of a concealed messiah presupposes the idea that he will be known later, in this case at the resurrection. Consequently, the idea of a concealed messiah is the later of the two ideas. If that is the case, if the idea of a concealed messiah is later, then it is hard to believe that Jesus had spoken of himself as the messiah. Traditions can be twisted and turned but why would anyone in a confessing community wish to deny messianic claims already made by Jesus?

Thus hardly any possibility remains other than the suggestion that the idea of the secret arose at a time when as yet there was no knowledge of any messianic claim on the part of Jesus on earth; which is as much to say at a time when the resurrection was regarded as the beginning of the messiahship.⁴⁶

What most likely happened was that the Christian community was beginning to see more and more messianic material in the life of Jesus and yet knew that his messiahship was not recognized until the resurrection.

⁴⁶Wrede, p. 228.

The concept of the "secret" then was the means by which the community dealt with this contradiction.

The second concept in the "secret" motif, the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples, supplements the first concept. As the disciples came face to face with Jesus in his resurrection appearances, they experienced a tremendous revolution in their understanding of him. At his death they had become disillusioned and fragmented. But because of the resurrection appearances, they suddenly are back together again as individuals and as a group and have a great message to proclaim boldly. This experience of the disciples, which became the basis of their proclamation, was grasped by the Christian community and made a deep impression on it. Wrede states,

The transformation which comes with the Resurrection is all the more perceptible the more harshly the blindness of the earlier period was noticed; the light became the brighter in proportion to the darkness with which the shadow was depicted.⁴⁷

Thus the lack of understanding on the part of the disciples has a historical base. Their understanding before the resurrection was nothing as compared to afterward. Yet, the degree to which this is emphasized in the Gospel of Mark is the work of the Christian community in its effort to authenticate the faith.

This then is Wrede's understanding of the role of the concept of the messianic secret. Mark wishes to bring together two divergent views: The church of his day proclaims Jesus as the messiah, and yet,

⁴⁷Wrede, p. 235.

it is known that Jesus made no messianic claims during his earthly life. By using the idea of the messianic secret in which Jesus hides his true nature and is not understood, Mark is able to bring together these two views of his own time.

Much consideration has been given to Wrede's development of the messianic secret concept. It is the hope of the writer that this coverage has helped the reader understand the development of Wrede's thought and how he arrives at his conclusions. It is the hope of the writer that, at least, Wrede is no longer "secret." At this point, it is appropriate that other scholars' views on the concept of the messianic secret be considered in order that some degree of perspective might be achieved.

OTHER SCHOLARS

Looking at the field of Biblical scholarship since the time of Wrede one cannot help but see Albert Schweitzer as one who stands head and shoulders above the crowd. Schweitzer will be the first scholar considered in this section. Schweitzer will be considered first because of his closeness in time to Wrede, and because of the thoroughness of his work.

Albert Schweitzer

Schweitzer published in 1906, *Von Reimarus zu Wrede*. When this volume was translated into English it became *The Quest of the Historical Jesus*.

In this work Schweitzer critiques Wrede's understanding of Mark's messianic secret. Schweitzer first points to the areas where he and Wrede are in agreement. Both do not see Mark as a historical life of Jesus. They see a lack of connections between the various *pericopes* that would allow a history of Jesus either in events or developmental revelations. Both see Mark as a combination of some little historical background with a strong dogmatic theme.⁴⁸ But that is as far as the agreement between Schweitzer and Wrede goes.

Schweitzer states his disagreement with Wrede:

He is unwilling to recognize that there is a second, wider circle of mystery which has to do, not with Jesus' Messiahship, but with His preaching of the Kingdom, with the mystery of the Kingdom of God in the wider sense, and that within this second circle there lie a number of historical problems, above all the mission of the Twelve and the inexplicable abandonment of public activity on the part of Jesus which followed soon afterwards. His mistake consists in endeavoring by violent methods to subsume the more general, the mystery of the Kingdom of God, under the more special, the mystery of the Messiahship, instead of inserting the latter as the smaller circle, within the wider, the secret of the Kingdom of God.⁴⁹

This is Schweitzer's primary criticism of Wrede's approach. However, to get to this statement of their basic differences, Schweitzer outlines several inconsistencies which he finds in Wrede's arguments.

Schweitzer first takes exception with Wrede over the authorship of the concept of the messianic secret. Wrede says the concept is not the product of an individual and is pre-Markan. In other words, it is a part of the tradition of the church. Schweitzer contends that the

⁴⁸Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Macmillan, 1968), pp. 333-337.

⁴⁹Schweitzer, p. 349.

"secret" as presented in Mark is a literary device and thus the work of an individual. He argues that if the concept were a part of the tradition it would have been presented in a more logical, straightforward manner that would have boldly altered the basic material. "Mark's way of drawing threads of a different material through the texture of the tradition, without otherwise altering it, is purely literary, and could only be the work of an individual."⁵⁰

The only other possibility is to perceive two stages of tradition at work. Wrede finds it necessary to admit the possibility of two stages for he is unable to subsume under the messianic secret the accounts of: Peter's confession, the entry into Jerusalem, and the confession before the High Priest. If these accounts are a part of traditional material not covered by the literary hypothesis of the "secret" they are open to be regarded as historical. The same is true with the passion story:

The representation that Jesus was publicly put to death as Messiah because He had publicly acknowledged Himself to be so, must, like the High Priest's knowledge of His claim, be referred to the other tradition which has nothing to do with the Messianic secret, . . .⁵¹

If it has nothing to do with the "secret" then it possibly is historical and can be accepted as such until proven otherwise.

Schweitzer systematically covers the examples Wrede chooses from the last days of Jesus' life and demonstrates the difficulty of seeing the tradition of the church as the author of the "secret." The result of the "secret" motif is to date the messiahship of Jesus back

⁵⁰Schweitzer, p. 350.

⁵¹Schweitzer, p. 342.

to his earthly life. Why would the church wish to do this? Schweitzer can only conclude that the church had no interest in doing such a thing. He points, for evidence, to Paul and *Acts* where there is a complete indifference to the earthly life of Jesus. The church's theology was a theology of the future not of history. It was dominated with the expectation of the *parousia*. Consequently, Schweitzer states, "It is therefore difficult to suppose that the Messianic secret in Mark, that is to say, in the very earliest tradition, was derived from primitive theology."⁵² It was the creation of Mark.

Schweitzer also disagrees with Wrede's view of the disciples' understanding of the resurrection. Wrede states the disciples came to know Jesus as the Messiah because of the fact of his resurrection appearances. Schweitzer points out that Mark 6:14-16 indicates there also was belief in the resurrection of the Baptist; and yet, he was not thought of as Messiah. How then did they know Jesus as the Messiah but not the Baptist? Schweitzer views Wrede's terming the resurrection appearances as "historical miracles" of no help, for if that is the case, then in order for the disciples to recognize Jesus' messiahship, the historical Jesus had to make some sort of reference to this messianic nature. However, this is contrary to Wrede's picture of Jesus who made no messianic claims during his earthly life.⁵³

Schweitzer blames part of Wrede's misunderstanding on the fact that Wrede did not consider any themes or moods of the day, but deals only with the Markan text. As a result of this narrow approach Wrede

⁵²Schweitzer, p. 344.

⁵³Schweitzer, p. 346.

is forced to view, for example, the prohibitions not to speak of the miracles as a part of the messianic secret. If the prohibitions are a part of the "secret" then the miracles must be understood as proofs of messiahship. Schweitzer points out that in Matthew the miracles have nothing to do with proving messiahship; but rather indicate mercy and as such are a call to repentance (Matthew 11:20-24), or indicate the nearness of the Kingdom of God (Matthew 12:28). Schweitzer feels they have a similar role in Mark: "The miracles are connected with the Kingdom and the nearness of the Kingdom, not with the Messiah. But Wrede is obliged to refer everything to the Messianic secret, because he leaves the preaching of the Kingdom out of account."⁵⁴

Schweitzer sees Wrede's greatest weakness in his consideration of the parables of Mark 4. Here Wrede defines the mystery of the Kingdom of God as the secret of Jesus' messiahship. According to Schweitzer there is no basis for this understanding in the parables themselves. The reader will recall, that this is the very point at which we started the consideration of the divergence between Schweitzer and Wrede. Schweitzer contends that the mystery of the Kingdom of God is the dominant dogmatic theme in Mark and the messianic secret is a subtheme. It is appropriate then, at this point, to move to a consideration of Schweitzer's understanding.

Schweitzer does not follow the same format as Wrede in which the gospel accounts are considered one at a time. Instead, Schweitzer attempts to look at both Mark and Matthew as well as some of Paul to

⁵⁴Schweitzer, p. 348.

come to his understanding. These particular sources are chosen because Schweitzer sees them as products of Jewish apocalyptic thought.

Schweitzer's basic assumption is that the time of Jesus' earthly life was filled with eschatology. With this in mind he understands John the Baptist, Jesus and Paul as manifesting the culmination of the Jewish apocalyptic concepts of their own time.⁵⁵ Schweitzer's task is not that of Wrede's, attempting through the study of Mark to determine the church's understanding of Jesus, rather, Schweitzer is attempting through eschatology to determine Jesus' understanding of himself and his world.

Jesus knew he was the Messiah, but this was not his main concern nor the subject of his teaching. Jesus was proclaiming the secret of the Kingdom of God. Schweitzer sees in the parables of Mark 4 Jesus' imminent expectation of the coming of the Kingdom. Jesus sends out his disciples to call the people to repentance, expecting the Kingdom to come before the disciples are able to return.⁵⁶ But this does not happen. He then begins to speak of the great sufferings and persecutions that will take place as the Kingdom breaks in on history. In seeing himself as the coming Son of Man who would usher in the Kingdom, Jesus saw that he would need to be removed from this life and transformed. Schweitzer sees the disciples' questions of Mark 9:33 and 10:35ff. as evidence that they too were aware of the transformation he was expecting.⁵⁷

⁵⁵Schweitzer, p. 368.

⁵⁶Schweitzer, p. 359.

⁵⁷Schweitzer, p. 365.

Jesus understood the delay in the coming of the Kingdom to indicate that there was still something that needed to be done. The movement of repentance had not been sufficient. Jesus then perceives that the time of trial and suffering will not come because God has removed it. Instead Jesus will do the suffering and thereby bring in the Kingdom.⁵⁸

Schweitzer points out that the ovation Jesus received on entering Jerusalem was not a messianic ovation. Jesus is the one who prepared for the entry and made the arrangements. Thus the messianic features were due to his efforts not that of the people.⁵⁹ The people thought of him as a prophet. Consequently, even during the stay in Jerusalem, Jesus' messiahship was still a secret to all except his disciples. How then did the High Priest find out about his messianic claims? The disciples had learned of his nature at Caesarea Philippi where Jesus after Peter's confession had begun to tell them of his need to die. Judas, as one of the disciples, had that knowledge. What Judas told the chief priests was not only where they could find Jesus but also that he thought of himself as the Messiah. Schweitzer believes that the people did not even know Jesus was on trial let alone that he was the Messiah until they appeared before Pilate for the customary release of a prisoner at the feast. The priests had worked quickly in hopes of getting rid of Jesus before the people knew what was happening. But now surprised by the people, the priests go out among the people and tell them that Jesus claimed to be the Messiah.

⁵⁸Schweitzer, p. 390.

⁵⁹Schweitzer, p. 394.

At once the people's opinion of him as a prophet worthy of honor disappears and they denounce him as a blasphemer.⁶⁰

Schweitzer's claim is that Jesus knew he was the Messiah but kept it secret, concentrating more on bringing in the Kingdom of God. Wrede understood Mark, and thus the church, to be saying Jesus never spoke of himself as the Messiah. Yet knowing from its own experience of the resurrection appearances that he was the Messiah, the church developed the idea of the "secret" to explain his silence.

To this writer it seems that Schweitzer's main contribution towards refining Wrede's concept is in the question, Why should *messiahship* be the appropriate understanding of the raised Jesus?⁶¹ Does it not seem logical that for the disciples to recognize Jesus as the Messiah, they had to have at some point some input that then became the basis for their recognition? Until this question is answered, Wrede's position is untenable.

T. A. Burkill

T. A. Burkill subtitles his volume *Mysterious Revelation*⁶² "an Examination of the Philosophy of St. Mark's Gospel." Mark's purpose in writing his gospel, according to Burkill, is to demonstrate that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God. Mark's gospel is at once an account of how one can come to that decision about Jesus and also

⁶⁰Schweitzer, p. 397.

⁶¹Emphasis mine.

⁶²T. A. Burkill, *Mysterious Revelation* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1963).

an account of how many of Jesus' countrypeople did not come to that decision. The philosophical explanation of Mark then is an attempt to show the reader just how it was possible for Jesus to be the Messiah and yet not be recognized as such.

Burkill understands Mark as distinguishing four stages or periods of God's plan of salvation. First, the period of preparation which ends with the imprisonment of John the Baptist, the appointed forerunner. Second, the period of Jesus' ministry on earth which is characterized by suffering and obscurity. Third, the postresurrection period in which the messiahship of Jesus is openly proclaimed. Lastly, the period of eschatological fulfillment which will be initiated by the coming of the Son of Man at his *parousia*.⁶³

Related to the stages of God's plan of salvation is the emphasis which Burkill sees Mark putting on the predetermined will of God. An example is Mark's use of the miracle accounts. For Burkill the miracles reveal the messianic nature of Jesus, yet he can say, "It was a direct consequence of God's predetermined purpose that the people should not appreciate the miracles of Jesus as manifestations of his messianic dignity."⁶⁴ Much of what happens in the accounts given is thus explained, according to Burkill, as part of God's predetermined plan.

The concept of the messianic secret is a component part of the second stage of God's predetermined plan of salvation.

⁶³Burkill, p. 175.

⁶⁴Burkill, p. 80.

This conception of the messianic secret would follow as a natural consequence from St. Mark's fundamental conviction that the whole career of Jesus is a fulfillment of the saving purpose of God. On the one hand, he upholds the apostolic belief that Jesus is the Messiah whose coming was foretold in the scriptures and whose divine status was revealed in all his words and works. On the other hand, he holds as a matter of historical fact that Jesus was not recognized as the Messiah by his own nation, but was rejected and even handed over to the gentiles to be crucified. Hence, by resorting to the conception of the secret, St. Mark is able to maintain the apostolic belief in the Messiahship without denying the plain facts of the historical traditions.⁶⁵

Another element which Burkill finds in Mark is bipolarity.

Mark recognizes the suffering and humiliation in the life of Jesus and yet has faith in the Messiah's promised triumph. The consequence of bipolarity is that Mark does not speak of the Messiah's suffering or the afflictions of the church without also speaking of the future when they will be justified.⁶⁶

Burkill sees Mark's emphasis in the earthly life of Jesus centered in the theme of secrecy and humiliation. The secrecy is a part of God's predetermined will and will not end until the resurrection. (Mark, according to Burkill, does seem to modify this position to some extent near the end of the gospel.) As a part of this predetermined secrecy, Jesus speaks and acts so that men will not discover his divine nature and accept him for what he really is, the Messiah, the Son of God. As has already been mentioned, though the church came to see the messianic nature of Jesus revealed in his miracles; this was not clear to his contemporaries. The lack of comprehension was at least in part achieved by Jesus' own injunctions to silence. He would

⁶⁵Burkill, p. 69.

⁶⁶Burkill, p. 178.

not permit the people to discuss what had happened. Also his use of parables was an instrument of hiding the secret. This is stated clearly in 4:10ff. Burkill states,

Jesus deliberately chose to address the people in parables for the purpose of preventing them from knowing his real nature; or, to express the same doctrine in different language, it was predetermined in God's plan of salvation that the parables should guard the mystery of the Kingdom. This is the point of the quotation of Isaiah 6:9-10.⁶⁷

Burkill views Peter's confession at Caesarea Philippi not as the climax of the conversation with Jesus but as the starting point and presupposition of the teaching that follows. Burkill claims that it is possible Jesus' use of "Son of Man" in 8:31 is an attempt to distinguish between the true meaning of messiahship as evidenced in Jesus as opposed to the popular messianic ideas of the time, which Peter seems to have in mind.⁶⁸ Though the disciples' understanding after Peter's confession appears to be no more acute than before, the confession fulfills an important role in the gospel. Mark is now able to introduce to his readers the eschatological necessity of the passion. The true nature of Jesus, which his countrymen cannot see, is that of the Messiah and "something of the glory of the exalted Son of Man is already revealed even amid the lowliness and shame of the life of Jesus of Nazareth."⁶⁹ Burkill believes Mark's concern for a right understanding on the part of his readers goes far beyond Peter's confession. Consequently Burkill sees the first thirteen chapters

⁶⁷Burkill, p. 110. The Isaiah passage forms the basis of Jesus' statement in 4:11f.

⁶⁸Burkill, p. 152.

⁶⁹Burkill, p. 180.

setting forth ideas in the light of which the reader may be enabled to interpret the passion correctly.

The messianic secret is an important element in Mark's presentation. However, Burkill feels that Mark felt it necessary to contravene the secret at various points. At the confession of Peter the secret is disclosed but not understood. In order for Mark to be sure his readers are convinced of the reality of Jesus' messianic nature, at the transfiguration Jesus is revealed to Peter, James and John and the reader in the full glory proper to the Messiah, the Son of God. Also at 14:62, in the confession before the High Priest, from Jesus' own mouth comes a statement about his nature in the terms of the church's belief. Mark in his concept of bipolarity takes the position that though Jesus suffers much now, in the future (after the resurrection) he will triumph in glory. Some sort of principle of divine retribution exists. The suffering and glory belong to different periods of time. This bipolarity is where Mark starts; however, near the end he seems to move his emphasis. Burkill summarizes,

Apparently, he is not completely satisfied with the doctrine that the humiliation of the Messiah is the appointed means to his future triumph, and thus he comes to attach a greater degree of intrinsic importance to the incarnate life than seems to be allowed in the epistles of St. Paul, who betrays little or no interest in the actual details of the Lord's earthly ministry. Probably the delay in the arrival of the *parousia* helped to bring about the new emphasis.⁷⁰

In summary it can be said of Burkill that he sees the messianic secret as an important element in the Gospel of Mark, but he does not

⁷⁰Burkill, p. 321f.

have the same perception of it as does Wrede. Burkill joins Schweitzer, and thus is against Wrede, in saying the secret is a creation of Mark.⁷¹ Burkill's perception is that the secret serves Mark well for awhile, but in his interest to show that the real nature of Jesus, his messianic nature, can be seen in Jesus' life, Mark drops the emphasis on the secret. Burkill gives the reader a unique insight in his suggestion that the delay in the *parousia* might have been the cause of this change of emphasis. What is most important though is Mark's move toward narrowing the gap between the Messiah's humiliation and triumph. The life of Jesus as well as his crucifixion and resurrection is affirmed as a part of God's plan of salvation in Burkill's understanding of Mark.⁷²

Rudolf Bultmann

Bultmann deals with the messianic secret in brief but deliberate style. For Bultmann neither the synoptic tradition nor Paul measure Jesus' life and work as messianic. What Jesus said and did was not messianic by traditional or popular understandings of the time. However the church speaking out of its post-resurrection faith cast the accounts of Jesus' life and ministry in the light of messianic faith. Mark's creation of the messianic secret is an attempt to deal with this contradiction. Bultmann sees the secret as Mark's for he perceives

⁷¹Burkill actually goes a step further than Schweitzer and makes the secret a subtheme of a much larger concept, God's four-stage plan of salvation.

⁷²Burkill, p. 323.

it occurring in the editorial sections of the gospel not the traditional units.⁷³

Martin Dibelius

For Dibelius the secret can only be understood in relation to the whole work of Jesus. It is not possible to link its application just to one or two individual stories. It is for Dibelius a biographical motif, a method of explaining why Jesus was not seen as the Messiah even when his fame was widespread. Dibelius states that the intention of those passages where Jesus commands his miracles be kept secret is twofold: (1) to show that Jesus did not wish to be honored as a miracle worker, (2) to show in spite of so many proofs of his supernatural power, how he was not recognized as the Messiah.⁷⁴

Dibelius perceives Mark's reasoning as this:

To the evangelist the life of Jesus as a whole is only comprehensible on the assumption that Jesus intentionally kept His real status secret. He was the Son of God, but He did not reveal to the people who He was.⁷⁵

It was obvious by what Jesus said and did that he was the Messiah, yet the people grew more and more hostile to him; consequently, he must have kept his identity a secret. This is Mark's only way of explaining Jesus' rejection by those he sought to serve.

⁷³Rudolf Bultmann, *Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951), I, 26-32.

⁷⁴Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 223.

⁷⁵Dibelius, p. 229.

Dibelius summarizes his understanding of Mark as a book of "secret epiphanies." The divine is made manifest to man yet is not understood. The secret therefore is very important to Dibelius' understanding of Mark's gospel. Mark perceives Jesus as Son of God. Yet Mark knows Jesus was rejected so he must have kept his true identity a secret.

Oscar Cullmann

Oscar Cullmann stands in a tradition unlike any other considered to this point. Cullmann rejects Wrede and all others who claim that the messianic secret is the creation of the early church, Mark, or anyone other than the historical Jesus. Cullmann understands the gospel tradition to portray Jesus as one who sees Satan at work in the contemporary Jewish conception of the Messiah. Thus, according to Cullmann, it is Jesus himself who is the source of the commands not to proclaim him as Messiah. Jesus was afraid such a proclamation would lead to a misunderstanding of his task. Cullmann stresses that his Jesus evidenced "restraint" towards the title of Messiah, but did not reject the title. Several scholars,⁷⁶ who do not accept Cullmann's position, have asked why Jesus did not simply say he was not the political Messiah or whatever understanding of messiahship he was rejecting for himself. Cullmann claims Jesus did make it clear as to

⁷⁶E. Percy, *Die Botschaft Jesu* (Lund: Gleerup, 1953), pp. 271ff., cited by Oscar Cullmann, *The Christology of the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1959), p. 124, n. 3. Percy claims agreement with Wrede on this point.

who he was but that he did not reject the title of Messiah because it was not understood just as political. Thus, the reason for restraint but not rejection. Cullmann argues that restraint not rejection is the best proof of the fact that the secret is history not early Christian tradition.⁷⁷

As support for his understanding of the messianic secret, Cullmann perceives Jesus' (notice he does not say Mark's) preference for the title "Son of Man" over "Son of God." "Son of Man" is the preferred title because like "Son of God" it emphasizes the identity of Jesus' will with God's, but unlike "Son of God" it could not be misunderstood as a claim to majesty. It is the historical Jesus who disclaims both "Messiah" and "Son of God."⁷⁸

Later in the same work Cullmann states that Mark's Christological thought places special prominence on the title "Son of God." The intent of the gospel is to show that Jesus is the son of God. The reserve is that of Jesus himself. Cullmann notes that some sources have the very first verse designate Jesus as God's son and in all the centurion at the cross confesses him as Son of God. The infrequent use of the title in between is due to Mark's respect for Jesus' own reserve:

Mark apparently has a very special understanding of the fact that it [the title "Son of God"] expresses the most secret and final revelation of the person and work of Jesus. Therefore he tries to respect Jesus' own reserve in this matter by carefully leading the reader by a historical presentation alone to the centurion's confession.⁷⁹

⁷⁷Cullmann, p. 125.

⁷⁸Cullmann, p. 282.

⁷⁹Cullmann, p. 294.

In summary, Cullmann understands Mark's intent as demonstrating Jesus as Son of God. The messianic secret is the result of Jesus' own caution in having the people identify him in terms of the contemporary Jewish understanding of Messiah.

Vincent Taylor

Vincent Taylor is one scholar who appears to be close to Cullmann in his approach to the gospel of Mark and the secret. Taylor's basic view is that Mark presents an historical account of the work of Jesus.⁸⁰ Jesus knew he was the Messiah, that was his destiny in God's plan. However, he could not be known as the Messiah until his destiny was fulfilled. He had to complete his work. Thus, Jesus silenced the demons and demanded silence of his disciples until after the resurrection.⁸¹

G. H. Boobyer

In contrast to the thought of Cullmann and Taylor is G. H. Boobyer.⁸² Boobyer contends that Wrede has approached Mark with too narrow an understanding. In opposition to Wrede's singular emphasis

⁸⁰So also Frederick H. Borsch, *The Son of Man in Myth and History* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), p. 320. . . . it is the story of Jesus and not the myth as such which has governed the Markan programming.

⁸¹Vincent Taylor, *The Gospel According to St. Mark* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1966), p. 122f.

⁸²G. H. Boobyer, "The Secrecy Motif in St. Mark's Gospel," *New Testament Studies*, VI:3 (April 1960), 225-235.

on the secret motif, Boobyer sees three associated motifs in Mark: (1) secrecy, (2) publicity, and (3) revelation. The Christian readers of the gospel are the recipients of revelation. To them is given the knowledge that the pre-Easter events were fully messianic.⁸³ According to Boobyer the disciples are also the receivers of revelation but they receive it only imperfectly.

The motif of publicity is manifested, for Boobyer, in the passages where Mark reports Jesus openly performing miracles in the presence of the crowd which sometimes includes the Scribes and the Pharisees. Publicity is seen as early as 1:28 where it states that Jesus' fame went everywhere. However, in spite of the publicity, nowhere before the arrest does Jesus apply messianic titles to himself in public nor does he allow others to do so. Neither the publicly performed miracles nor the publicity received amounts to public disclosure of the messiahship. Boobyer states that there was public manifestation of Jesus' power but it never led to public messianic revelation. He also believes that it was never intended to do so.⁸⁴

For Boobyer the secret may have some historical background but in its form in Mark it is definitely doctrinal. There are two periods of revelation with the dividing line between the two at Easter. After the Easter event there is full revelation as to the nature and work of Jesus. Before Easter it is a period of humiliation for Jesus and

⁸³Boobyer lists as illustrations of this contention: 1:1; 1:13; 2:10f. when understood as an aside to the reader; 4:22f.; 9:9; 13:14.

⁸⁴Boobyer, p. 232.

concealment of his true identity. There are also two classes of people: those inside the community of believers who will know the secret of the Kingdom of God, and those outside the community who will never know. The secrecy passages, with the exception of the misunderstanding of the disciples, illustrate God's judgment against the outsiders (the nation Israel). The disciples in time will know the secret, but the outsiders will never discover its meaning. That is the judgment of God.⁸⁵

Richard Longenecker

Richard Longenecker in a survey article⁸⁶ proposes a unique approach to understanding the secret in the Markan presentation of Jesus in light of the Jewish understanding of the messiahship. Longenecker bases his observations on an article by David Flusser.⁸⁷ Flusser's findings concluded that from a strictly theological point of view no person could be designated as "messiah" before the task of the anointed had been accomplished. The function and work must be accomplished before the title may be claimed. Thus, Jesus, the Qumran Teacher of Righteousness, and Simeon ben Kosebah, all of whom demonstrated hesitancy in asserting messianic claims, were just following

⁸⁵Boobyer, p. 235.

⁸⁶Richard N. Longenecker, "The Messianic Secret in the Light of Recent Discoveries," *Evangelical Quarterly*, XLI:4 (October-December 1969), 207-215.

⁸⁷David Flusser, "Two Notes on the Midrash on II Samuel 7," *Israel Exploration Journal*, IX:2 (1959), 107-109.

a common motif basic to Jewish thought. All three were acclaimed as Messiah, yet each showed reticence to speak of himself in the terms others were using. And yet the accounts which we have of each indicates a consciousness on the part of that individual of the ultimate validity of the titles attributed to him.

With this background provided by Flusser, Longenecker then looks at the accounts of Jesus in the Synoptics. Only in Luke 24 does Jesus directly initiate the discussion of his messiahship and here it is postresurrection. So in Acts 2:22-35 Peter, while acknowledging heavenly attestation of Jesus during his earthly ministry, centers his attention on the fact that God raised Jesus up. Peter's conclusion being, "Therefore, let all the house of Israel know assuredly that God has made him both Lord and Christ."⁸⁸

Thus, the messianic secret was a tool of Mark, in accordance with the typical Jewish understanding of the day. In the postresurrection time Jesus was recognized as Messiah because of the resurrection and in continuity with his own self-consciousness during his ministry. The Christology of the early church was a Messiah Christology as a result of the resurrection. There was no more fundamental understanding of the nature of Jesus than Messiah.⁸⁹

David J. Hawkin

Hawkin, writing in the *Journal of Biblical Literature*,⁹⁰ seeks

⁸⁸Longenecker, p. 214.

⁸⁹Longenecker, p. 215.

⁹⁰David J. Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the

to explain one aspect of the secret, namely the incomprehension of the disciples. For Hawkin, the incomprehension of the disciples has implications for the whole gospel as well: ". . . the intention of Mark is to reveal the nature of Jesus' messiahship to the reader of the gospel by thematizing the incomprehension of the disciples."⁹¹

According to Hawkin, 1:14-8:21 is dominated by the question, "Who is Jesus?" In this section Jesus' identity is secret. In the second section, 8:22-16:8, the question is answered by demonstrating the role of Jesus and the disciples' incomprehension of it. It is Hawkin's understanding that in Mark Jesus' addresses to the disciples are addresses to the church of Mark's time. In centering in on the confession of Peter and the following *pericope*, Hawkin seeks to demonstrate the connection between the messianic secret--the identity of Jesus, and his messianic mystery--his destiny of death and resurrection.

Hawkin sees 8:27-33 as one narrative complex made up of two *pericopes*. There are four themes in the complex: (1) the messianic identity of Jesus, (2) the secrecy motif, (3) the messianic mystery of Jesus, and (4) the incomprehension of the disciples. The relation between the two *pericopes* is that of thematic progression. The confession of Peter is the climax of the struggle to recognize who Jesus is. Having now stated who Jesus is, (Peter's confession is also the confession of Mark's church and Mark himself) Mark is now ready to

Marcian Redaction," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XCI:4 (December 1972), 491-500.

⁹¹Hawkin, p. 493.

move on to a new phase of his gospel. In the following *pericope* Jesus begins to teach of his coming fate. Hawkin believes Mark's intention here is to show in the secrecy motif, which he understands as the withholding of the revelation of Jesus' messiahship from Israel at large, the theme of darkness in which light is offered to unbelievers. The incomprehension motif thematizes the new and different darkness of the depths of thought to which the believer is now called. In the incomprehension of the disciples Mark is showing the reader exactly what the church is called to understand. That which Peter repudiates the church is called to affirm both in the life of Jesus and in its own life as well.⁹² The secret, for Hawkin, is an important motif of Mark's gospel. It represents God's judgment on the nation of Israel. It is also the symbol of the contrasting darkness of the new understanding which Mark is attempting to convince his church is the true nature of Jesus' work.

Theodore Weeden

Theodore Weeden is one of the more recent contributors to the discussion of Mark's gospel. In his volume *Mark-Traditions in Conflict*⁹³ Weeden proposes an approach to the earliest gospel unlike any considered to this point. He perceives five major characteristics in the Markan account: (1) the messianic secret; (2) the persistent

⁹²Hawkin, p. 500.

⁹³Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark-Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971).

obtuseness of the disciples; (3) the use of material from the *theios-aner* (divine-man) tradition; (4) the structural arrangement of the gospel around motifs such as the call to discipleship, summary statements on Jesus' ministry, conflict, and passion; (5) and emphasis on the suffering Christology and discipleship.⁹⁴ These are the subject matter areas covered by Mark. To appreciate what Mark is attempting to say in his gospel, Weeden contends that we not only need to be aware of what characterizes the gospel but also what those characterizations meant to the first century reader.

Weeden reminds us that the early readers of Mark did not have any other extended narratives about Jesus. Neither were the "complete" documents of Matthew, Luke, and John available so the first readers were not aware that Mark was incomplete.

In addition to the recognizable lack of competition in the gospel field, other factors influenced the early readers' understanding of Mark. Weeden points out that the education of the time centered on the epic poets and prose writers whom we now regard as the classics. Two elements were present in this literature: A great interest in characters, and a sense of "judgment" or the coming to some moral principle from the thoughts and behavior of the characters. Weeden maintains that the twentieth century reader must approach the gospel with this kind of understanding also, if he is to find the true intent of the writing.⁹⁵

⁹⁴Weeden, p. 7f.

⁹⁵Weeden, p. 14.

With this background Weeden begins a study of the characters in the Markan gospel. There are essentially three groups presented to the reader: (1) the religious establishment (Pharisees, Saducees, Scribes, Elders and Chief Priests) who are depicted as the enemies of Jesus and are held responsible for his death; (2) the masses who have a generally positive response to Jesus; and (3) the disciples which are the subject of Mark's most intense scrutiny.

Of Mark's treatment of the disciples, Weeden states, "I am convinced . . . that a careful analysis of Mark's presentation of the disciples supports the contention that Mark is engaged in a polemic against the disciples. . ."⁹⁶ There are three stages in the disciples' relationship to Jesus, the second and third progressively worse than the preceding stage. The first stage occupies the first half of the gospel (1:16-8:26) and demonstrates that the disciples are unable to perceive who Jesus is. The second stage is introduced in Mark 8:27ff. and is identified by Weeden as a period of misconception. At Caesarea Philippi Peter discovers that Jesus is the Christ, but though his formula is right his content is quite wrong. The disciples do not have the same understanding of the nature of messiahship as Jesus claims for himself. The disciples reject the concept of a suffering and dying messiah and the necessity of suffering discipleship. "The conflict over the correct interpretation of messiahship widens into a general conflict and misunderstanding in almost every area of their relationship with each other."⁹⁷

⁹⁶Weeden, p. 26.

⁹⁷Weeden, p. 34f.

Weeden sees the third stage as one of rejection, introduced with Judas' decision to betray Jesus to the religious hierarchy (14:10ff.). The outright rejection of Jesus and his messiahship is introduced by Judas but continued by the episode in Gethsemane and climaxed by the denial of Peter. Weeden summarizes,

I conclude that Mark is assiduously involved in a vendetta against the disciples. He is intent on totally discrediting them. He paints them as obtuse, obdurate, recalcitrant men who at first are unperceptive of Jesus' messiahship, then oppose its style and character, and finally totally reject it. As the coup de grace, Mark closes his Gospel without rehabilitating the disciples.⁹⁸

The conflict between Jesus and the disciples in the eyes of Mark is clearly a Christological conflict. It is in this conflict that the moral teaching or "judgment" will come to the fore. The Christology which Mark pictures Jesus espousing is that of suffering that leads to death. The Christology of the disciples is based on the *theios-aner* (divine-man) understanding of the messiahship. The Messiah is one who is a combination of the divine and human, who works miracles on behalf of man. The seriousness of this Christological clash comes to a head in 8:27-33. Peter is right in stating who Jesus is, but when Jesus then attempts to insure that the disciples know what being the Christ means: suffering, rejection and death; Peter rebukes Jesus. Peter cannot accept Jesus' definition, for what he is saying is against the *theios-aner* Christology. But Jesus says, "Get behind me Satan! For you are not on the side of God, but of men" (v. 33). It is at this point that Weeden deals most effectively with

⁹⁸Weeden, p. 50f.

Wrede and his position.

Many advocating the Wredian position would argue that the Caesarea Philippi pericope only indicates a shift in messianic instruction to the suffering Son-of-man concept, which like the former christological titles applied to Jesus, must remain obscure, unknown, and unpublicized until the resurrection. But this is the error of the Wredian position. The Son-of-man position is the one christological title that is not suppressed in the Gospel.⁹⁹

Weeden is quick to point out that as early as 2:10, 28 Jesus identifies himself as the Son of Man and there is no attempt to hide this or any of the Son of Man revelations. This is the correct Christological point of view as far as Mark is concerned so it is the one that is not silenced.

Weeden sees the reason for this great debate within the midst of Mark not as Mark's understanding of the historical situation between Jesus and his disciples. Rather, Mark's Christological interests must have some reference in his own existential community. Weeden's view, developed at some length and with much thoughtfulness, is that Mark faced a two-pronged problem. First, facing the unexplainable delay in the *parousia* and with the church having to undergo much suffering, he had to convince his community to keep the faith that the Lord is coming imminently. Second, there were others in the community, the *theioi-andres* to whom Mark refers in Mark 13 as the false Christs, who were trying to convince the people that the Lord had already returned.¹⁰⁰ Thus what we see in chapter 13 is Mark's solution. The chapter is organized with a view of this sequence in mind: the coming

⁹⁹Weeden, p. 67.

¹⁰⁰Weeden, p. 96.

end of world history, the collapse of the cosmos and then the *parousia*. Mark made it clear that the end was not yet, he even went to the trouble of inserting minor phrases such as (13:7) "this is but the beginning of the suffering," but in so doing he made it abundantly clear to his readers that it was impossible for anyone to even consider the possibility that the Lord had returned. Thus he was attacking his opponents through an understanding of history. But he was also attacking them in the great Christological debate between Jesus and the disciples. Mark's Christology was affirmed by Jesus while his opponents' was supported by the disciples who in the gospel account were totally discredited.

Wrede saw 9:9 as the hermeneutical key to the several elements in Mark which considered together became the "messianic secret," the explanation of why Jesus was not recognized as the Messiah until after his resurrection. For Weeden such an understanding of 9:9 is mistaken. It is not an attempt to explain a lack of public knowledge of Jesus, rather it is a polemic against the disciples and their representatives in Mark's community. Most likely 9:2-5, 7, 8 was a pre-Markan resurrection story. Mark predates the story and by adding the warning of 9:9 to not speak of the occurrence until after the resurrection provides an implication as to how it could have been considered a resurrection appearance. Mark's inserting of 9:6 makes Peter and the others look bad, and then the heavenly voice's statement in the new Markan context in which Jesus has been and will continue to talk about suffering and death, supports Mark's own point of view.

Wrede attempted to find a means of dealing with four themes he found in Mark: (1) Jesus' silencing of the demons' confessions; (2) Jesus' command to those healed to seal their lips with regard to their healing; (3) Jesus' secret instruction to his disciples, and (4) the disciples' failure to understand Jesus. With Weeden's approach the silencing of the demons and the healed persons becomes a method of saying no to an heretical Christology; the identity of Jesus is only sometimes held in secret (only when misconceived), but Jesus is quite open about his Son of Man nature; and the disciples' failure to understand is not a part of the secret motif as much as it is an element in Mark's attack on the disciples themselves and the ideas they represent.¹⁰¹ Weeden and Wrede are poles apart. The messianic secret as conceived by Wrede has no meaning in Weeden's approach to the Markan account. Weeden can deal with the whole gospel and not touch what Wrede would have to contend was an essential element of the gospel. The difference lies in what they see Mark trying to accomplish.

Norman Perrin

Norman Perrin proposes a view congruent with that of Weeden. Like Weeden, Perrin sees Mark as an attempt to play down and correct the *theios-aner* Christology. He also agrees with Weeden that the secrecy motif is a part of this attempt to deal with an understanding that in Mark's eyes is incorrect and in need of confrontation.¹⁰²

¹⁰¹Weeden, p. 138f.

¹⁰²Norman Perrin, "The Christology of Mark, A Study in

William C. Robinson

William C. Robinson writing in *Interpretation*¹⁰³ expresses a point of view compatible with that of Weeden. For Robinson the secret is Mark's. The object of concealment is not Jesus' power for that is clearly demonstrated, but rather his true Christological identity. Peter's confession is where Robinson centers down for his evaluation. Peter is silenced because he makes a Christological statement that is separated from the theology of Jesus' death, which Robinson feels to be the focal point of the gospel. Robinson sees the debate, as does Weeden, as a Christological one. He does not see a unity in the secrecy passages so he cannot contend as does Weeden for an anti-*theios-aner* Christology. Rather Robinson sees Mark advocating a theology of the cross with the motivation that Jesus' life become a pattern of all Christian life: giving of oneself for others.¹⁰⁴

Reginald Fuller

Reginald Fuller sides much closer to Weeden: "Mark is directed against the *theios-aner* christology."¹⁰⁵ For Fuller the

Methodology" (paper presented to the Seminar on Christology of the New Testament at the annual meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, August 1970, Newcastle upon Tyne, England), p. 5.

¹⁰³William C. Robinson, Jr., "The Quest for Wrede's Secret Messiah," *Interpretation*, XXVII:1 (January 1973), 10-30.

¹⁰⁴Robinson, p. 26f.

¹⁰⁵Reginald H. Fuller, *The Foundations of New Testament Christology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1965), p. 240f.

messianic secret is not as Wrede stated, an attempt to impose a Christology on a nonChristological tradition. However, the secret serves to tone down the strong epiphany Christology which Mark found in the tradition. This is done by making the epiphanies, secret epiphanies and by enjoining those who pierce the secret not to publish it until after the cross and resurrection.

Paul J. Achtemeier

Achtemeier sees Mark as countering the *theios-aner* Christology of the tradition and attempting to lead his reader into a different understanding. Achtemeier believes the secret may be involved in the attack on the *theios-aner* position. However, the secret does not appear to be at all important to Achtemeier's understanding of the gospel for he formulates his understanding with no critical attention given to the secret.¹⁰⁶

William O. Walker, Jr.

Walker is yet another who agrees with Weeden that Mark is attempting to correct a false Christology in the early church. Though Walker asserts, like Weeden, that "Son of Man" is Mark's designation of the correct Christological opinion of Jesus, he chooses not to explore what role the secret plays in the gospel.¹⁰⁷

¹⁰⁶Paul J. Achtemeier, "The Origin and Function of the Pre-Markan Miracle Catenae," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XCI:2 (June 1972), 218.

¹⁰⁷William O. Walker, Jr., "The Origin of the Son of Man Concept as Applied to Jesus," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XCI:4

CURRENT STATUS OF THE SECRET

The attempt to uncover the true meaning of the messianic secret is still in progress. Wrede set in motion a search that is yet underway. From Wrede's time to the present the secret has had considerable coverage by biblical scholars and theologians. Any person attempting to deal with the Gospel of Mark who has not given consideration to the secret has omitted a significant element of the gospel. Of the fifteen scholars considered in the previous section of this paper only two did not deal with the secret, Achtemeier and Walker. The others perceived it having varied significance but all felt compelled to deal with it. To this writer this is partly due to the significance of Wrede's work. In the Gospel of Mark research Wrede stands as one of the milestones that must be recognized to maintain a critical bearing on the gospel. Disagreement with Wrede is common and necessary, but nevertheless Wrede must be recognized, for he demonstrated the importance of the secret passages to the understanding of the gospel as a whole. To deal with Mark is to deal with Wrede and the secret.

Agreement is not to be found in the secret research. Most scholars appreciate the method of Wrede but few are willing to accept his conclusions. After a respectful nod to the founder of the tradition each researcher goes his own way. For example Bultmann and Dibelius who both stand in the form criticism tradition explain the

(December 1972), 482-490.

historical background of the secret differently. For Bultmann Jesus did not act the part of the Messiah but the church saw him as such; therefore the need for the secret. On the other hand Dibelius saw Jesus acting out the role of the Messiah but the people rejected him and thus the need for the secret. Cullmann and Taylor both feel the secret to be historical, thus totally rejecting the Wredian position. Hawkin sees the secret theologically as the judgment of God on Israel. The gamut is covered. Consequently the mere surveying of critical literature does not produce a consensus.

Mark is not presenting a history of Jesus in his gospel. Rather as a creative redactor he is taking various units of tradition about the Lord of the church and weaving them into a statement of faith not just an account of history. Mark the author is no simpleton. The complexity of his work demonstrates his resourcefulness in using a variety of materials already existent in the life of the church, his creation of new themes to establish the point of his writing, and an openness to that which is to come in the future.

The secret is Mark's creation. It is a thematic tool by which he molds his presentation to carry the reader to a predetermined conclusion. Mark uses the theme of the secret not just to inform his audience but to convince them. In the introduction to this paper Mark 1:28f. was used as an example of a secret passage. Wrede gave coverage to such a unit in his consideration of the secret concept. However, 1:28f. is generally agreed to be a formulaic saying for exorcism therefore for some scholars not a part of Mark's secret

theme. Yet for example for Weeden even though it might be a formulaic saying the manner in which Mark uses it in the gospel demands its consideration as an element of the secret. Thus, Wrede's four category understanding of the secret, as outlined in the introduction, will still constitute the messianic secret theme as discussed from this point on.

Weeden's argument that Mark is witnessing to his own church on behalf of a suffering and passion Christology is most convincing. Burkill, Hawkin, Robinson and Walker all agree that it is to his own church that Mark is addressing himself. Weeden's argument that Mark is writing against the *theios-aner* Christology is most appealing. That a Corinthian situation is being addressed by Mark is a possibility, but Weeden's development of this point needs some support. Achtemeier joins Weeden on the anti-*theios-aner* team, seeing Mark as an attempt to discredit the *theios-aner* Christology. Perrin certainly agrees that Mark was writing to his own church and using the gospel form to convince them of his point of view. But for Perrin it is not enough to say that Mark is writing against the *theios-aner* and for the suffering Christology. Both Weeden and Perrin are in essential agreement about the importance of the *parousia*. Perrin sees it as the central concern of the gospel and views Mark as an attempt to lead the reader through the passion and resurrection to a state of preparation for and expectation of the *parousia*. Weeden, on the other hand, perceives Mark giving central importance to the Christological controversy. Mark does this, according to Weeden, because it is the same controversy

that exists in his own church and he is fearful the people will follow the *theioi-andres* and not be prepared for the real *parousia*. Perrin and Weeden agree on Mark's line of thought, they do perceive different emphases within that agreed upon line of thought.

Fuller in *The New Testament in Current Study* understands the secret as a means of toning down the Christology of the tradition.¹⁰⁸ This works well with Weeden and Perrin. Mark, unhappy with the *theios-aner* presentation of Jesus, takes the stories of that tradition and after each epiphanal event has Jesus water-down the occurrence. Fuller sees this usage of the secret as a constant reminder to the reader that the deeds of the earthly Jesus were just preliminary manifestations of the power of God to be known in the risen Christ.

In summary then it seems to this writer that the secret is definitely a subtheme in the gospel. Bultmann's claim that the secret is an explanation of the contradiction between the messianic claim of the church and the nonmessianic life of Jesus makes good sense. But that seems to sell Mark short on creativity. If he is truly writing to his own church why must he convince them of this point? Fuller's understanding of a toning-down role for the secret is also credible. Most likely Mark did use material from the *theios-aner* tradition, the epiphanal stories; but, was his sole purpose to convince a la Paul that the real Messiah was not known until the crucifixion and resurrection?

¹⁰⁸Reginald H. Fuller, *The New Testament in Current Study* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1962), p. 82.

Weeden and Perrin propose the most convincing understanding of the role of the secret. The secret functions to discredit the *theios-aner* Christology of Mark's church as represented by the disciples. Then through the words of Jesus, especially in his Son of Man sayings, the true Christology, the suffering-servant understanding of who Jesus is, as well as the suffering-servant discipleship is placed before the reader. This approach recognizes the ability of Mark to be the creative redactor so many scholars claim him to be. This approach makes the secret an integral element in the thrust of the whole gospel.

The theme of the messianic secret is a subordinate theme in the Gospel of Mark. In dealing with the Gospel of Mark one must confront the secret, but one must realize Mark's true intention was much larger than to discredit a particular line of thought in the church. It is to consider that true intention that we now turn.

Chapter 3

THE RELATION OF THE MESSIANIC SECRET TO THE WHOLE OF MARK

Much of what is to be covered in this chapter has already been touched upon; however, the importance of understanding the relationship between the secret and the whole of Mark is such that we devote this chapter to that relationship.

THE NATURE OF THE MESSIANIC SECRET-- IT'S THEOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE

The messianic secret is one element of Mark's network of concepts that corporately make up the intention of his gospel. The theological significance of the secret is the result of how Mark uses the secret materials in the gospel. Perrin states, "The messianic secret is a literary device made necessary by the fact that Mark is using narrative for a didactic purpose, and it is a means designed to achieve that purpose more effectively."¹ To this writer the purpose of the secret most clearly is to subordinate or negate a particular point of view. If one follows the thinking of Reginald Fuller, the secret tones down the epiphany stories related to the life of Jesus. By subordinating these stories the author is then able to stress the

¹Norman Perrin, "Towards an Interpretation of the Gospel of Mark" (unpublished paper, Divinity School, University of Chicago), p.22.

contrasting open acknowledgment of Jesus as Messiah after the resurrection. This argument has much merit but it seems to this writer that Mark is trying to do much more.

According to Theodore Weeden the purpose of the messianic secret, its theological significance, is to negate the popular Christological view in Mark's church. In writing of 8:27-33 he states, ". . . I cannot see how this can be anything but a negative response by Jesus to the confession of Peter and the disciples."² As was stated earlier, Mark has the disciples and especially Peter present the arguments of the popular beliefs of the church. Jesus then counters with the position that Mark wishes to impress on his fellow-believers. This passage, the so-called confession of Peter, is the clearest example of this dialogical conflict. Weeden identifies the position of the church as the *theios-aner* Christology similar to that suspected in the Corinthian situation. Whether Weeden is totally accurate is still being questioned. He does amass good support for his position and his is the most definitive statement of those considered by this writer. If Weeden is correct in describing the object of the secret as the *theios-aner* position, then Fuller's understanding could also be considered appropriate here as well. The *theios-aner* Christologists state that Jesus is an epiphany of God, he is a God-man. Whether one is, a la Fuller, toning down an epiphanal Jesus until after the resurrection to explain the position of the church, or whether one is,

²Theodore J. Weeden, *Mark-Traditions in Conflict* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1971), p. 65.

a la Weeden, attacking the epiphany theology of the church; both positions are looking in the same direction. The thought that dominates the gospel is in that direction.

THE PRIORITY OF THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS IN MARK

The most widely accepted view is that Mark's gospel is "a passion narrative with an extended introduction."³ This statement which, according to Perrin, was originally made by Martin Kähler has had much play in many theological circles. Perrin himself speaks of "the controlling influence of the passion"⁴ when referring to the inner dynamics of ideas within Mark. According to Martin Dibelius, the passion narrative was the earliest connected narrative to come out of the Christian tradition.⁵ The basic historical outline was embellished with stories and accounts that gave significance and meaning to the whole account of Jesus' journey to his death on the cross. Dibelius asserts that the passion narrative was the only account in the early gospel tradition which brought together individual events and gave them context and greater meaning.

³Norman Perrin, "The Christology of Mark, A Study in Methodology" (paper presented to the Seminar on Christology of the New Testament at the annual meeting of the Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas, August 1970, Newcastle upon Tyne, England), p. 2.

⁴Perrin, "Toward an Interpretation . . . ," p. 22.

⁵Martin Dibelius, *From Tradition to Gospel* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1971), p. 180.

R. H. Lightfoot describes a principal theme of the gospel as "Messiah crucified."⁶ He sees this theme, that of the passion, dominating the account from the event at Caesarea Philippi until the end of the gospel. Before Caesarea Philippi Lightfoot notes a strong Markan emphasis on Jesus' mighty works. This corresponds with Weeden's understanding of Mark "setting up" his *theios-aner* opponents by using much of their material. However, Lightfoot is clear in remarking that the pre-Caesarea Philippi account is not void of passion-oriented material. Specifically he cites the occasions in 2:1 and 3:6 where hostility is shown to Jesus as gentle forewarnings to the reader of what is to come.

Hawkin recognizes the importance of the theology of the cross. He essentially divides the gospel into two sections, 1:14-8:21 and 8:22-16:8. The first section is dominated by the question, "Who is Jesus?" The second section is Mark's answer to that question. Within that second section, Hawkin identifies 8:22-10:52 as the "Way of the Cross" which he claims has long been recognized for its unity, centrality and importance to the whole of Mark. Hawkin's study, which is based on the incomprehension of the disciples, comes to a significant conclusion. His conclusion is that the law of the cross is the "supreme eschatological reversal." Hawkin sees Mark as saying ordinary human values and judgments are reversed in the passion of Jesus and the disciples are shown that what is "the good" is not

⁶R. H. Lightfoot, *The Gospel Message of St. Mark* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950), p. 500.

necessarily "the good for me." Hawkin closes his study with this statement, "Only by understanding what the disciples failed to understand can the catechumen be initiated into the mystery of Christ."⁷ The way of the cross is not only the appropriate understanding of the life of Jesus but is the appropriate understanding of life for those who would be his disciples.

The theology of the cross has had long and broad acceptance. Earlier in this paper it was stated that Vincent Taylor is one who perceives Mark to be an historical account of Jesus. Thus he is one who rejects much of what Wrede has to say about Mark as a whole and the messianic secret in particular. Yet Taylor is not weak in his affirmation of the theology of the cross. He singles out as the sole intention of the gospel to " . . . show how Jesus, the Messiah, came to His Passion and His Cross."⁸

Hans Conzelmann states that Peter's confession and the transfiguration account introduce the period of the passion.⁹ This then becomes a significant point in the gospel since the passion is the dominant theme. Morton Enslin echoes the same point of view when he says, "Mark carries what may be styled the 'shadow of the cross' farther and farther back. Paul makes it at the resurrection: Mark

⁷David J. Hawkin, "The Incomprehension of the Disciples in the Marcan Redaction," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, XCI:4 (December 1972), 500.

⁸Vincent Taylor, *Formation of the Gospel Tradition* (London: Macmillan, 1953), p. 186f.

⁹Hans Conzelmann, *An Outline of the Theology of the New Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1969), p. 142.

eventually carries it back to the very beginning of the ministry."¹⁰

In the last chapter attention was given to those scholars who felt Mark was addressing his own church concerning a true Christological understanding of Jesus. Willi Marxsen, though not considered in chapter two, is of this group. What Marxsen calls "the Life of Jesus" material, the tradition prior to the passion narrative, he contends must be understood from the viewpoint of the cross. He goes on to state, "It is most often true of a literary work that what follows interprets what precedes."¹¹ William Robinson fits into that category of scholars and yet he wants to say more. Robinson contends that Mark had Jesus repudiate Peter's confession about his identity because it was a confession of Christology separate from the theology of Jesus' death. Robinson states, "At 8:30 Mark's primary concern was discipleship not christology."¹² Robinson contends, along with Weeden, that Mark's church had a miracle-worker Christology. Robinson sees Mark as an attempt to correct that Christology but more specifically to correct the view of discipleship implicit in it by means of the theology of the cross. Robinson concludes, "Mark was motivated by a concern for living the Christian life on the pattern of Jesus who gave himself for others."¹³

¹⁰Morton S. Enslin, "The Artistry of Mark," *Journal of Biblical Literature*, LXVI:4 (December 1947), 398.

¹¹Willi Marxsen, *Mark the Evangelist* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), p. 33.

¹²William C. Robinson, Jr., "The Quest for Wrede's Secret Messiah," *Interpretation*, XXVII:1 (January 1973), 27.

¹³Robinson, p. 27.

Theodore Weeden without equivocation affirms the priority of the theology of the cross. In speaking of the centurion's confession, Weeden contends the crucial point of the passage is that the centurion recognized Jesus to be the son of God solely from witnessing Jesus' suffering and death. "That Jesus is the Son of God or Messiah entirely by virtue of his suffering path in life and death is a conclusion that Mark refuses to let his readers avoid."¹⁴ Much later in his book Weeden states, " . . . the cardinal christological point of Mark's Gospel [is]: that Jesus' messiahship can be defined only by crucifixion."¹⁵

Perrin, in writing of the prediction passages, states that the purpose of those passages is not only to interpret the passion but also to interpret discipleship in light of the passion. Like several other scholars, Perrin sees Mark writing for more than just instructional purposes. The fundamental concern of Mark, according to Perrin, is apocalyptic. He is seeking to lead his readers through the use of the passion and resurrection stories to be personally ready for the *parousia*.¹⁶ Thus, for example, the references in 14:28 and 16:7 are not to resurrection appearances to take place in Galilee but to the *parousia*.

Marxsen also sees Mark writing from this place in time: "For Mark the situation seems to be self-evident. He cannot construe the resurrection and Parousia as successive or even as simultaneous events

¹⁴Weeden, p. 54.

¹⁵Weeden, p. 110.

¹⁶Perrin, "The Christology of Mark . . . ," p. 4.

for the mere reason that he writes his Gospel between them."¹⁷ Weeden perceives the Markan community as distressed over the unexplicable delay of the *parousia*. Mark attempts to reassure the church that the *parousia* is imminent and thus not to lose faith. Weeden understands Mark to be claiming there is but one way to prepare for the *parousia*: "A place in the parousia event comes only by living the way of the passion."¹⁸ Mark is concerned that his community know the *parousia* has not yet happened but is soon to come. The emphasis of his gospel then is on a suffering-servant discipleship as the way to the *parousia*.

Perrin sums up well the need for suffering discipleship in his treatment of Mark 13. He sees this chapter as more than a correction of false Christology and false expectations for the Son of Man.

Rather Perrin sees Mark leading his readers to the situation where they will endure their present suffering and maintain their conviction that it all will climax in the coming of Jesus as the Son of Man. In the apocalyptic picture Mark paints in chapter 13 he seeks to convince his readers that they can endure just as Jesus endured his passion.¹⁹

The Gospel of Mark is more than a passion narrative with an extended introduction. However, it cannot be denied that the author, Mark, has placed major emphasis on the theology of the cross. The example of the passion of Jesus is the model for the church. Those who wish to participate in the *parousia* will choose a suffering-servant

¹⁷Marxsen, p. 112, also 133.

¹⁸Weeden, p. 113.

¹⁹Perrin, "Towards an Interpretation . . . ," p. 16.

discipleship. Mark's concentration of the theology of the cross is for more than purely academic reasons. He is attempting to do more than characterize the life of Jesus. Mark centers down on the passion of Jesus and the cross for to him that is the only model for Christian discipleship. His point is to move his readers to a suffering-servant discipleship.

Mark does place a priority on the theology of the cross but how does that relate to the messianic secret? It is to that question that we now turn.

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE MESSIANIC SECRET AND THE THEOLOGY OF THE CROSS

The first section of this chapter concludes that the messianic secret is a subtheme of the Gospel of Mark. It is important to the whole gospel yet it is not the controlling influence. As a subtheme in the gospel its purpose is to subordinate or openly discredit, depending on one's point of view. This writer would like to suggest that it serves the purpose of placing concepts in perspective.

Section two concludes that the theology of the cross is the dominant theme of the gospel. Conzelmann states, "The whole book [Mark] is shaped by the Easter faith . . . The characterization of the Markan theology as a *theologia crucis* is apt. This also governs the messianic secret."²⁰ Such is the relationship between the two themes. Mark wrote for the purpose of persuading his readers that

²⁰Conzelmann, p. 143f.

their discipleship need be grounded on the model of Jesus, that of the suffering-servant. Whether one sides with Weeden in understanding Mark as openly attacking a specific school of thought such as the *theios-ners*', or whether one sides with William Robinson in understanding Mark as claiming that a Christology separate from a theology of death is unacceptable; one can affirm the relationship of the secret to the theology of the cross to be one of perspective. Mark's perspective is that the cross is primary and the secret is secondary. But even as secondary the secret is necessary. The messianic secret theme holds the divine manifestations of Jesus in tension with the suffering teachings and actions of Jesus. Mark is toning down, subordinating, discrediting the *theios-ner* representation of Jesus and lifting up, emphasizing, promoting the suffering-servant nature of Jesus. The situation to which Mark addressed himself, must have demanded such a treatment otherwise there would have been no need for the dual emphasis.

Mark, in passionate logic, seeks to convince his readers of the appropriateness of suffering discipleship as the only response true to the nature of Jesus. Mark is logical in that he knows one's Christology, what one thinks about the nature of Jesus, will control one's discipleship, the manner in which one follows Jesus. Mark is passionate in that he rejects the *theios-ner* Christology and discipleship and calls for the affirmation of the suffering-servant Christology and discipleship. Mark's perspective, like the Cross of Calvary, stands high on the hill of his gospel. The reader cannot

face his gospel without seeing the bold outline of his affirmation. Mark calls for action. Having been exposed to the cross, which Mark holds high, the reader must either say yea or nay. One cannot be opinionless for Mark so clearly states his own conviction that the reader must either choose to accept the cross as his own and carry it, or he must turn his back on it.

In summary then it can be said that Mark's major concern is to advocate a suffering-servant discipleship based on a suffering-servant Christology. Mark's advocacy is brilliantly revealed in the manner with which he uses a variety of episodes from the tradition about Jesus and gives them his own setting and content. Mark is very much the creative redactor who uses history and tradition laced with liberal layers of his own thought to convince the reader of a particular point of view. The messianic secret, throughout its negative influence, acts to affirm that point of view which is that the suffering-servant Christology is that which best characterizes Jesus and suffering-servant discipleship is that which persons are called to embrace if they choose to follow Jesus.

At this point the review of the history of the messianic secret, the appraisal of its current status, and the effort to determine its relationship to the whole of Mark is now finished. The challenge now is to take what has been deduced from the work to this point and consider how such an understanding of Mark and his message affects the hermeneutical process. Such a challenge will be attempted in chapter four.

Chapter 4

IMPLICATIONS FOR PREACHING

The purpose of this chapter is to build on what has been discovered in the previous three chapters so that preaching from the messianic secret passages might be possible. Using the conclusions of the study of the secret, especially what this writer understands to be its role in the gospel, as well as the conclusions reached as to its theological significance and relationship to the whole of Mark, this chapter will center on three areas: (1) how these conclusions relate to exegesis, (2) how these conclusions can be applied to Christian living in our time, and (3) how these conclusions affect the task of preaching the whole gospel of grace, judgment, and obedience.

EXEGESIS

Exegesis is the first step in the process of preparing for a preaching assignment. The exegetical method is the serious Bible student's key to discovering what the text says. Kümmel¹ gives a most helpful outline as to what exegesis involves. When facing a particular text of New Testament literature the first step is textual criticism.

¹Otto Kaiser and Werner G. Kümmel, *Exegetical Method* (New York: Seabury Press, 1963), pp. 35-48.

One should use a text with a critical apparatus, such as Nestle,² and attempt to establish the best reading of the given text. A consideration of the variant readings involves not only their attestation but also congruence with the wider meaning of the context. The boundaries of the unit need to be established and a translation made based on the research to this point. Along with the establishment of a translation there needs be a word study of ambiguous words in order that an exact reading may be reached.

Once the student has arrived at a translation Kümmel suggests attention be given to what he calls the "questions of introduction." This involves attention to questions dealing with the whole gospel with an eye to what light might fall on the particular text in view. Such questions involve the content of the gospel and an analysis of its structure, the literary character and theological purpose of the gospel, author, and time and place of composition. These questions, one must remember, most directly address the whole gospel, but are important to establish before going to any specific unit of that gospel.

Once a true reading of the text is obtained and the general questions of introduction are considered, then the purpose of the text in relation to the gospel needs to be explored. How does the surrounding context add to the understanding of the unit? Is it related to a particular source (not too appropriate for Mark, but very

²Bible. N.T., *Novum Testamentum Graece*, ed. by Eberhard Nestle (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1963).

important when studying in Matthew and Luke where Mark is one of the sources)? Is it a part of the oral tradition? Does the unit or parts thereof go back to the historical Jesus?

Having gone through this process, the exegete has a foundation for making a statement as to what is the meaning of the unit.

With this understanding of exegesis it is easy to see that what is attempted in Chapters two and three of this paper is an expanded part of the basic exegetical method. Chapter two establishes an understanding of the secret while Chapter three deals with its theological significance and its relationship to the dominant theme of the gospel. The secret is a part of Mark's redactional work. It is a subtheme in Mark's theological purpose of witnessing to the validity of the suffering-servant Christology and discipleship. In general the secret appears in conjunction with material taken from the *theios-aner* tradition and is used to subordinate those statements which acclaim Jesus to be a wonder-worker. As Mark's creation, it does not have any certain origin in the oral tradition or the life of the historical Jesus. However, it is quite possible that there is historical background for some of the secret material. For example, in the confession of Peter (8:27-33) it is quite possible that on one or more occasions Jesus and Peter were in dialogue concerning the nature of the messiah and that Jesus advocated the suffering-servant understanding. But that is not saying that what is read in the eighth chapter of Mark is all history. Rather, it is Mark's usage of a possible historical occurrence to drive home a strong conviction. There might be a kernel

of history behind the story but what is read in the gospel is Mark's redaction of that history.

As the first step in the preparation for preaching, exegesis is extremely important. It is at this point, in doing exegesis, that the preacher of Mark first deals with the concept of the messianic secret. The secret is one of the elements that must be encountered on the path to finding the true meaning of a given text.

APPLICATION TO TODAY

The task of the preacher of the gospel is to take the message of the scriptures and apply it to the present life situations being faced by Christian people. This application is the only manner in which the meaning of the gospel can have significance for those living today. If this process is not carried out, then Biblical literature becomes no more than good teaching and history. When the process is carried out, the literature of the Bible becomes the gospel, the "good news."

One word of procedure must be mentioned here. It is imperative that the exegetical process be completed before any attempt to make present day application is begun. This procedure is imperative because the application must be made on the basis of the fruit of the exegetical method. One element of exegesis is to establish the setting in life, "*sitz im leben*," of the individual unit. This attempt involves an effort to discover the situation to which this material was originally addressed. What conditions caused the author to write such

a statement? Once the setting has been established, the task of the preacher then is to take the message of the unit and determine what like setting exists in present day experience. When that match-up has been accomplished, determining the setting of the unit and the corresponding setting today, then the meaning of the unit will have significance for those attempting to live the Christian life. This process is necessary to avoid distorting the intention of the text to make it say what the individual preacher wants it to say.

The messianic secret is an instrument which Mark developed to deal with a particular problem facing the church in his day. The setting of the theme then is the church of Mark's time and in particular the specific problem which he attempted to address. This writer has previously detailed the nature of that problem so an outline will be sufficient here. There were those in Mark's church that by the sins of commission or omission were not witnessing to the gospel as Mark understood it. If Weeden is correct in identifying false prophets and false Christs as in the Corinthian situation then it is against their divine wonder-worker preaching that Mark is addressing himself. Or perhaps the situation was, as Robinson stated, a case of proclaiming Christology without any recognition of the theology of Jesus' death which was the foundational doctrine of the church to that point in time. Another possibility is that Hawkin is correct in stating the church was at the "what's in it for me?" stage. The people of the time were more concerned about their own well-being than anything else, and this concern shaped their Christology. In such a case, Hawkin's

reversal theory is an appropriate understanding of Mark. These are all theories with merit. Again this writer would have to say the force with which Mark writes makes Weeden the most promising of the contenders.

Regardless of which of these three scholars the reader feels is closest to the truth, there is much in present day life that corresponds to the conditions to which each felt Mark was responding.

As one surveys the current religious scene in the United States that which stands out most noticeably is that mainline Protestant churches are losing membership and attendance is down.³ The trends of just a few years ago have been reversed. On the other hand the fundamentalist and conservative churches are growing. There are many self-appointed sociologists who are pronouncing cause and effect but the consensus seems to be that the growing churches are the ones who have answers. These churches tell the people exactly what to do, what to believe, and how God will work in their lives. Everything is cut and dried. There is no mystery or uncertainty. Their's is a simplistic faith with no doubts. The present conditions of the world which cause uncertainty on all levels of existence make such positions appealing to many people. Today the problems of nuclear power and nuclear waste, pollution, Arab domination of the oil market, world-wide famine, the crumbling institution of the family, and much more have caused people to question the validity of an optimistic outlook

³The best analysis of the situation is Dean M. Kelly, *Why Conservative Churches are Growing* (New York: Harper & Row, 1972).

for the future. These problems coupled with an increase of number and voice of the apocalyptic end-of-the-worlders such as Hal Lindsey⁴ have made many people quite fearful of the future. They begin to look for easy answers and assurances. They place their hopes on the intervention of God by some miraculous means into their troubled world and they hope he will set everything straight. They are our present day *theios-aner* Christologers.

Coupled with this situation is one that is not unique to the Protestant church. The rise of glossalalia has manifested itself in both the Protestant and Catholic traditions. The result of this phenomenon is that many congregations are experiencing a divided community. There are two camps: (1) the truly saved, those who can prove it by having the gift of speaking in tongues, and (2) those who claim to be Christians but do not have this particular proof. Those who claim a special gift from the Holy Spirit set themselves up as *theioi-andres* who cannot be wrong in their understandings of the faith. Such was possibly the case with which Mark found himself confronted.

Always with the church are those who just say "believe in the name of Jesus and everything will be all right." These are the people who condemn the church for being too political and feel that religion is a purely personal matter. Such is the object of Robinson's concern as he understands the situation Mark was facing in his church.

⁴Lindsey is a prolific writer. Perhaps his best known work is Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).

On the other extreme from what has been mentioned to this point is another present phenomenon most popular with the young but spreading across age differences, that of the growth of mystery and eastern cultic worship. This writer, though not well-acquainted with these movements' many and varied facets, views the appeal of this type of experience as a withdrawal from involvement in the world. The concentration on meditation and inner, personal experiences indicates a great concern for the spiritual well-being of the individual, much of the time at the cost of concern for the rest of the world. Such is what Hawkin understood as the object of Mark's attention in the context of Hawkin's "reversal" idea.

What all this points to is that there is much thought and practice in the church today that, like the church in Mark's day, does not hold the suffering-servant Christology and discipleship in high regard. In these quarters, serious Christological examination is not taking place. Consequently, discipleship based on the model of the life of Jesus is not being called for or evidenced.

To summarize then, the understanding of the possible meanings of the messianic secret of Mark developed by this paper does have application to the Christian living in this time. The secret passages do have a message for the contemporary church.

RELATION TO THE WHOLE GOSPEL--

GRACE, JUDGMENT, OBEDIENCE

The task of preaching is one that many have attempted but few have mastered. This is especially true if one is certain to look at

the art with a critical eye searching for those who can communicate the whole message of the gospel in a typical sermon. Far too often sermons tend to be weighted in one direction or another. They are all judgment, or all grace; they are totally educational with no practical application, or they are all social action; they are heavy and depressing with no relief, or they are all levity with nothing serious to grasp.

This writer was first exposed to this criticism of sermon writing while at the School of Theology at Claremont. Under the leadership of the Reverend Dr. K. Morgan Edwards, Gerald Kennedy Professor of Preaching, the writer was introduced to the "whole gospel" understanding of sermon criticism. The whole gospel contention is that each sermon must contain grace, judgment, and obedience. Grace, or God's unmerited love for persons, is always the good news of the gospel. Each sermon offered to the congregations of Christian churches needs to lift high the love which God so freely pours out upon his people. Judgment, as understood here, is holding a mirror up to ourselves. It is the honest recognition of "missing the mark," of sin. Judgment is the confrontation of what we are really like in relation to that which God calls us to be. The third category is obedience, the response we as God's loved children can make in light of knowing his love for us. Having been judged and shown our sin, and notified of God's overwhelming love for us in spite of the sin, the sermon also needs to move us to a conviction to do something. The sermon calls for a response of practical obedience to God's love.

In the effort to preach on one of the messianic secret passages there must be an attempt to reflect the Biblical message through grace, judgment, and obedience. It is the position of this paper that the secret is an attempt on the part of Mark to negate an inappropriate understanding of the nature of Jesus and the type of discipleship demanded by that nature. Such a position makes Mark's use of the secret a vehicle of judgment. Mark, anxious to correct that fallacy in the church's understanding of the nature of Jesus, writes into the script of his gospel judgment lines for Jesus to speak. Certainly Jesus' referring to Peter as Satan with the additional remark, "For you are not on the side of God, but of men," (8:33) is a statement of judgment. The remarks do not reflect Jesus' long time opinion of Peter but are rather a response to Peter's attempt to deny what Jesus understood to be the true nature of messiahship. The judgment is on the concept of messiahship which Peter and the disciples represent. So also is the case when after an exorcism or healing Jesus admonishes those present not to tell of what has happened. This is again Mark's judgment on this type of understanding of who Jesus is. Consequently, for the church today as for the church of Mark's time, that which denies the suffering-servant nature of Jesus stands judged by the messianic secret.

What of grace in relation to the secret? When preaching on a secret passage one is not limited to that particular passage for resources for any of the whole gospel elements. Thus those scripture units, affirmations from tradition, illustrations from life, and

personal experiences which affirm the love of God are all appropriate. Some discretion does need to be taken to ascertain that material used be compatible with the thrust of the scriptural message. It seems to this writer that due to the nature of the secret, some illustrative material would be better than others. If the judgment is on those who deny the suffering nature of Jesus then the clearest example of God's grace is in fact the servant nature of Jesus. Attestation to this understanding of Jesus in particular and this concept of the messiah in general is found in the Old Testament, especially II Isaiah, and throughout the New Testament. The grace of God is that his Son is one who came to serve.

The element of obedience in relation to the secret theme is easily outlined. That plan of action to which Christian people are called in response to understanding Jesus as a suffering-servant, is to accept the servant style as their own. This end is the whole intention of Mark: to convince his readers that their discipleship needs to be one of service to others based on the model of their Lord. The Christian stance is to move beyond a concern only for self, to an active quest for the welfare of others, even at the cost of oneself. Servant discipleship is the only response to the one who says, "Come follow me."

This chapter has been devoted to demonstrating how one is to approach the task of sermon preparation. The necessity of the three-fold path of proper exegesis, determining settings and applications, and confronting the "whole gospel," cannot be stressed enough. It has

been shown how each of these three processes intersects with a Biblical theme such as the messianic secret. Now it is necessary to prepare sermons based on the findings of Chapters two and three, using the method of Chapter four. Two such sermons will be the content of Chapter five.

Chapter 5

TWO SERMONS

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate the practical application of the messianic secret. Two sermons are presented here as hermeneutical examples of applying the meaning of the secret to contemporary life. After each sermon a brief critical analysis is appended. These statements explain the attempt of the sermon and make other necessary remarks.

MOUNTAINS ARE FOR LISTENING

Text: Mark 9:2-13

The life of Jesus is a witness of quiet service. To be sure there were moments in Jesus' life when he was loud, possibly even boisterous. No doubt there were occasions when joyous laughter issued from his heart. We know there were times when his anger mounted to a frenzy, his soul became weary, his body tired, and his spirit depressed. But what we know best of Jesus is his life of quiet service.

This model is an enigma to us in our present-day world of urban noise and frantic schedules. We know there are some who yet spend their lives in quiet service, but in our day they are the invisible people, those whom everyone ignores and no one cares about. They certainly are not considered leadership material. They are not the ones who are going places, getting ahead, or making a name for

themselves.

We, as a people, are anything but quiet. We specialize in much noise and little action. We are a generation of talkers. We tell all we know before we know enough to tell. We pour forth the promises but short-change the services. We talk across the backyard fence, on the telephone, or over cocktails but we have an aversion to action.

That which we enjoy best characterizes us. One of the longest running shows on television now is the Tonight Show with Johnny Carson. It is a talk show, and the part the viewers like best, the monologue. There are talk shows on television in the morning, in the afternoon and late at night. The best known television personalities are the news commentators who morning, noon, and night tell us what we are doing.

The church is no exception to our obsession with talk. The heroes in the field of religion are the professional talkers. The radio and television evangelists have the ear and mind of thousands of people everytime they speak. Billy Graham and his kind pack out civic centers, football stadiums, and baseball parks in town after town. People hang on their every word.

I had the opportunity recently to hear Marjoe Gortner at the University of California at Santa Barbara. For an hour a crowd of six hundred watched and listened to his film, a self-documentary of his experience as an evangelist. Then he spoke for another forty-five minutes about his convictions, plans for the future and regrets of the

past. The audience loved him. They called en masse for a demonstration of his evangelistic style. They wanted to hear him talk. After almost two hours of nothing but Marjoe talking on film and in person, their common desire was to hear him talk.

Talking in itself is not inherently bad but the danger of our style today is that too often we talk before we know our subject. Our obsession with telling all we know and then some has led us to do just that: talking without knowing fully about what we speak. Our tendency is to fire when only half-cocked, dictate without direction, speak without specifics, and preach without purpose.

Recently a rally was announced for the city hall steps in Los Angeles. Some twenty people showed up placards in hand, each supporting a different cause. Not one put down his or her placard to help someone else's cause. They all talked but no one listened.

Ours is a day of decibel readings in our cities, airplanes that have to take off over the oceans, megaphones on our courthouse steps, five hundred watt stereos, and acid rock bands that crack the plaster and leave us deaf for hours, with the possibility of permanent tissue damage later. And continually through it all Mozart is on the Muzak just in case someone or something ceases for a moment to talk to us.

But why? Why is this the way we live? Could it be that we are afraid we will hear that still small voice inside, or pick up the beat of that "distant" drummer of which Thoreau spoke? Why is it that we are continually talking or being talked at? Maybe, just maybe, it

is because we know there must be another way but we are afraid to try it.

I can remember as a child the wonder of going to the mountains. It was always so quiet there. The contrast was marked between the noise, turmoil and confusion of the city; and the penetrating quiet, calm and peace of the mountains. Mountains are for listening. Dad would shake me to consciousness early in the mornings and soon he and I would be out on an old abandoned logging road. As the sun slowly warmed the air and brought color to the forest, life was breathed into the world around us. Better than any t.v. show, or movie was the opportunity to listen to God's world as it awoke. From insects to birds, from inch worms to beavers all of God's creatures clicked and sang, moved and chewed to his glory.

Another of my favorite times in the mountains was right after a summer shower. As soon as the rain ceased to fall, the birds would fill the air with their songs of praise.

Late at night I would often go outside our cabin and look up to the myriad of stars in the sky. As I stood in the utter blackness of night with its full blanket of silence I would try to listen to the stars as they winked and blinked above. Much of what happens in our busy day-to-day city life thrills us to words, but it is only in the mountains that we can be thrilled to listen. Mountains are for listening.

When the disciples followed Jesus up the mountain in today's lesson from Mark, they beheld a great sight. There before them were

Elijah and Moses talking with Jesus. Immediately Peter reacted to the situation. His reaction is probably just what you and I would have done. He began to talk. "We must do something about this." "This has been a great moment in our lives." "Let's build a monument here. We can put a plaque on it to tell all who pass by what happened on this very spot. That way for years to come people will know that this is a holy place. We can petition the government to put up signs, improve the area, and designate it an official historical landmark." But Peter was cut short by an authoritative voice that had another option. That voice seemed to come from the very clouds themselves. It said, "This is my son, listen to him."

God cut through Peter's talk. He put an end to the gibberish of typical religiosity. He said, "Listen to my son." While the disciples were on the mountain God spoke to them to listen to Jesus.

Margery Kemp, a thirteenth century saint, captured this same message well with these words, "If thou wear the hair shirt, fasting bread and water, and if thou saidest every day a thousand pater nosters, thou shalt not please Me so well as thou dost when thou art in silence and sufferest Me to speak to thy soul."

We too need mountains to climb so that we may hear God call to us to listen to Jesus. We need mountains in school classrooms, in downtown basement garages, in beachfront townhouses, on assembly lines; wherever we are we need mountains, for we need to *listen* to Jesus.

We who are lay persons need to listen. We who are clergy need to listen. We who are the church need to listen. For so long now our

religion has been a religion of "say this and say that." But far too often what we said in the name of religion did not confirm others in the faith or strengthen our own souls. We need to listen, for God is saying to you and to me, "Jesus has something to say to you."

There are mountains for listening in our lives. They are those fleeting but frequent moments of quiet that often go unused. They are the services of worship, the study groups, the times of fellowship with friends, the minutes spent in serious sharing of our souls. Those are the moments to be in silence and to listen. Those are the times when God can come to us and say, "Listen."

This certainly is a good word for us in the kind of lives we have created for ourselves. It is a cause for hope to know that someone has something to say to us. Not just talk, but a message for our lives.

For those of us who have frequented the church for a number of years this news is not new. But yet how often have we stopped to listen to Jesus? For those who have not been in the church for long, I pray this is good news for you. If we can stop our practicing of religion just long enough to listen, the good news of the Christian faith will be heard, for it has always said, "Jesus has something to say to your life."

There is a way to break free from the life-trap we feel about ourselves. There is a way to stop firing off half-cocked. That is God's gift to bring meaning to our lives, that is Jesus.

The word that Jesus has for us is a word of service. What the

disciples were to listen to on the mount of transfiguration was Jesus' understanding of his role as Messiah. Morton Enslin has said that what was to be "heard" was the impending suffering and death of Jesus. To us that sounds depressing. But then consider the state of life in the time of the disciples. They were fumbling for direction, uncertain about their leader, and fearful of the future. Jesus gave them a purpose for living, the very same purpose he had for living: To be a server of others. We too are like the disciples, fumbling for direction, uncertain about those in authority, and fearful of the future. The message to be heard on the mountains of our lives, those times when we really listen for God's direction, is: serve. Give yourself to loving care for those around you.

That which transfigured Jesus, which made his whole life "glistening, intensely white as no fuller on earth could bleach it" was his willingness to serve, to suffer, to die for God's will. The gleam of our Lord's true glory was his devotion to serving other people. His divineness was his acceptance of human nature, his care for other people, his deep love for those who could do nothing for him.

Bishop Melvin Wheatley tells of a Pennsylvania school teacher who was having the members of her class tell what they were going to become when they grew up. Most of the class had answered. Some had said they were going to be doctors-nurses-teachers-farmers--all of them specific vocations which the youngsters had chosen. Then, in walked the principal. The only student left was Johnny on the back row. Johnny was not the brightest in the class and the teacher

figured he probably would say something stupid. After some hesitation she put the question to Johnny. "Johnny, tell us. What are you going to be when you grow up?" Johnny replied, "When I grow up, I am going to lead a blind man."

That is what Jesus has to say to us. Throw yourself into service for those less privileged. Work for justice for all persons. Practice living justly and loving kindness with everyone you meet. The paperboy deserves our service and concern, as do the clerk at the market and the attendant at the gas station. The garbageman is more than one to bribe to carry off our excess trash, he is a person of need, joy, and sorrow too. The way in which to break free of the continual barrage of talk and noise, confusion and misdirection, is a life of quiet service. A life of mountain-quiet listening to God and a life of action in serving those around us. What Jesus has to say to us is, give me your life in quiet service. He is not saying do not be what you honestly are. No, God never calls for us to be anything but honest and open. But he does call for us to choose that life-style that is most in tune with the purposes of his whole creation. We often need to laugh heartily, and sometimes sorrow deeply. Once in awhile we need to rage angrily. But most of all, God calls us through his son Jesus to serve quietly.

Jesus went to the mountains to listen. But he always came down ready and willing to serve the people. The disciples, while on the mountain were told to listen. The message was *serve*. Those who have ears to hear, let them listen. Amen.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

First, a word about choosing the transfiguration story as a text for a sermon dealing with the theme of the messianic secret. Mark 9:2-13 is obviously not dealing with one of the mighty works of Jesus and a resultant command from Jesus to maintain silence. But it is nevertheless a text that bears the message of the secret. The "wonder-worker," "mighty act," or *theios-ener* element in this passage is the transfiguration of Jesus in the presence of Moses and Elijah. Peter, responding in very human fashion, wishes to preserve the moment by building huts or tabernacles for each of the three. He misunderstands the event. At this point, the author Mark does not have Jesus correct Peter's perception of the occasion; rather, God speaks to Peter. Mark has God point to the significance of this event by telling Peter, the other disciples, and the reader to listen to Jesus.

In verse nine the secret formula finally appears. Jesus tells the disciples, as they descend the mountain, not to speak of what they have seen until after the rising of the Son of Man. Then he goes on to speak of the suffering nature of the Son of Man. The usual Markan secret pattern is in evidence in this account of the transfiguration.

It is the hope of the writer that this sermon will serve notice to the church of a widespread contemporary problem. Today's church is so institutionally oriented that one of two results inevitably follows a given incident. Either the issue is talked to death and no action is taken, or little reasoning takes place and too hasty action is taken. This pattern can be seen on the individual as

well as corporate scale. The intent of the sermon is to point out that there are occasions persons can use to gain direction and guidance for carrying out constructive action. There are mountains for listening in the time, people, and programs of daily living. God gives the ability and the resources to find his will and his way. The action that is called for is a life devoted to self-less service as modeled by Jesus. The attempt here is not to discredit some opposing understanding of the Christian faith, but rather to move people from a position of lethargy of mind and/or body to self-giving service. The implications of the theology of the cross, which influence our daily living are the thrust of the sermon. It is hoped that those who truly *listen* to this sermon, like those who truly listen to our Lord, will be moved to a life of deeper service.

"LOVE-FORTY, AND MATCH POINT"

Text: Mark 8:27-9:1

I first played tennis the last semester of my senior year of college. That was a time of turmoil and frustration for me. After having seven semesters of beginning golf, the coach recommended I take tennis. I liked tennis the first time I played it. Tennis seemed to me to be a good Christian game. At least in the way I play it, there is always a lot of love. For those of you unacquainted with the game, "love" in tennis means zero, no score, the very bottom. My game is usually a love game. I do not score a point and my opponent scores them all. So "love-forty" means I have not scored and my opponent is

one step away from winning the game. "Match point" means if he wins this point he not only wins the one game but the entire competition too. "Love-forty and match point" is absolutely the worst position in which to find oneself. The game is not over at "love-forty" but if immediate past experience is any indication it soon will be.

There are many observers of the human situation who feel that we are now at "love-forty and match point" in our lives. If one is to look around for any period of time that conclusion is not hard to accept. More and more nations, guerrilla forces, and so-called liberation movements are highly armed and doing more than carrying a big stick. With the passing of each day the massive problem of pollution seems to become more complex and the destruction of our earth and the environment continues unchecked. We view through television that areas once considered clean, now have known contaminated waters. The result is that every time we go to the tap, that which comes out still looks clear and clean, but it no longer tastes quite as good as it did the last time. We notice that the line at the filtered water dispenser at our grocery store is growing longer each time we pass.

The news of spreading global famine continues to assail us. The grotesque pictures make us retch with pity and yet we continue to eat and eat. We are confused about our obligations. There are the Garrett Hardins who claim we will not help the hungry by keeping them alive, and the good which we have done in the past is what is causing them so much grief now. There are yet others who say we have a moral responsibility to feed all who are hungry and starving.

The late Rabbi Abraham Herschel told this story. Once upon a time in a distant kingdom the grain crop was already harvested and stored when it was discovered to be poison. Anyone who ate it went insane. The king and his advisers immediately took counsel as to what should be done. Clearly, not enough food was available from other sources to sustain the population. There was no choice but to eat the grain. "Very well," the king said, "let us eat it. But at the same time we must feed a few people on a different diet so that there will be among us some who remember we are insane."

The events of the world going on around us say we are past that point when we still have a decision. Everyone is already insane. We have somehow been poisoned. We are at "love-forty and match point."

Recently the news people noted the one year anniversary of the kidnapping of Patty Hearst. On that particular night much of their coverage was devoted to recounting all the related events intimately or remotely connected with the Hearst affair. Yet on the minds of many people at that time was the continuing activity of the L. A. Slasher. As I listened to the newscast I thought to myself, why are we dragging up Patty Hearst when we have the Slasher staring us in the face? But as I thought about it, it seemed to me that even as sordid and incomprehensible as the Hearst saga has been it is somewhat more understandable than the Slasher. At least with the SLA and such we can see the Hearst kidnapping, brainwashing and whatever as a means to a politico-revolutionary end. But what are we to make of the Slasher? Is \$1.98 or \$2.00 the price of life today? Are there really those

among us who see another human being as nothing but an obstacle between us and the eight quarters that person has in his pocket? Much of what we face today has no understandable explanation behind it.

One of my "preacher" magazines ran this story. A computer was set up to notify magazine subscribers by mail when it was time to renew their subscriptions. One day it went sour, and before anyone realized the miscue a farmer in Montana received 11,834 letters telling him his subscription had expired. The local postmaster had to hire a special truck to deliver all the letters. After the farmer had read about two hundred of them, all exactly alike, he sat down and wrote out a check renewing his subscription. Attached to the check was a note which read: "I give up. My check is enclosed."

As we look at the world around us we too feel like writing a note and saying I give up. The score is "love-forty and match point." We know that technically we have one more chance but the odds seem to be overwhelming. We feel like giving up.

We do feel like giving up at times, yet deep down inside we do not want to be losers. We are well aware of the score in the game of life but nonetheless we do not want to be losers. Many has been the time when I stood at the back of a tennis court and said to myself, "O, somebody up there help me to get this one point." In our great desire to avoid being a loser we expect God to intervene in the game and make us a winner.

A young woman came to me recently and said she wanted me to make her husband come back to her. I told her I would be glad to talk

to both of them but I was not sure I could make anyone do anything. To that she said, "Then pray for me that God will make him come back and love me." There are times when we want to win so badly that we expect God to do our winning for us.

We think of God as "Mr. Blue Cross" the supreme insurance that we are not going to be losers. We expect him to intervene miraculously in our lives and set everything straight for us.

We do not want to be losers, so we expect God to be a winner for us. We expect him to come into our job situation and patch up all the problems. We expect him to bind up our marriage so that we will always be happy without any need to change who we are or our pattern of relating to others.

Peter was very much like this too. Peter did not want to be a loser. Let us look at the lesson read today from Mark. After Peter says to Jesus, "You are the Christ," Jesus begins to teach the disciples what being the Christ means. He speaks in terms of the suffering servant, the one who comes to serve and not be served. He speaks of suffering for others and facing rejection and yes, even death. Peter cannot accept this understanding of the Christ. He wants a superman who will make everything all right. He wants a miracle worker who will instantly change all that is bad into good.

This kind of thinking Jesus cannot accept. He says, "Get behind me Satan. Your thoughts are not of God but of men." What you are looking for is not what God expects but what men hope will get them out of their misery. Once again Jesus begins to speak and this

time it is about discipleship, how you and I are to live if we choose to follow him. He says, "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me."

When we stand at "love-forty and match point," that is the time for our best serve. The example of our Lord was a life of self-less service to others, and that is our model. That job situation that seems to be an impossible dead-end of conflict can be won for both sides. Try to understand the other person's position. What is it that makes him the way he is? Attempt to affirm him honestly in as many ways as you can. Look within yourself to see what you are doing that brings out the worst in him.

Choose to understand your spouse the next time he or she becomes angry instead of flashing back with your own anger. Evaluate what you have done to make yourself a likely target of frustration and fear. Openly state your own needs but seek more to fulfill the needs of the one who has agreed to work with you at this game called life.

God has already performed many miracles for all of us. He gave us eyes to see the expressions of pain on the faces of those around us. He gave us ears to hear the calls of help from those with whom we live. He gave us minds to think of the manifold ways in which we can find meaning for our own lives by seeking to serve others. God has done his miracles and his spirit is with us for guidance and strength, but at "love-forty and match point" the call is for us to give our best serve.

Jesus said, "Take up your cross and follow me." The two words

"follow me" mean so much. He has already been along this part of the path of life. He knows the way. His life is there ahead of us as a model to guide us. He guides us to give our best serve: our life in service to others. Amen.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS

The confession of Peter unit was chosen as a sermon passage for several reasons. One, the dialogue between Jesus and Peter is one of the clearest presentations of Christology in the entire New Testament. Mark's concept of who Jesus is is clearly set forth. Also, by expanding the text to 9:1 the reading includes what many scholars refer to as the *whole prediction unit*: (1) the prediction of suffering and death (8:31), (2) the misunderstanding of the disciples (8:32-33), and (3) the consequent teaching on discipleship (8:34-9:1). Not only is this a statement of Christology but a call to a particular discipleship as well. This is the intention of the whole gospel. Mark wants his readers to have a proper understanding of who Jesus is and adopt for their own lives the resultant form of discipleship. This two-pronged intention is well stated in this passage.

The writer has chosen terminology from the game of tennis as a vehicle of communication because of the great popularity of that game at present. Most people today, even if they do not play the game themselves, are somewhat familiar with it.

The intention of this sermon is to demonstrate that the model of our Lord calls us to a discipleship of service. The method used to

get to that point is a simple one. Mark wrote to a people facing grave problems in their individual and corporate lives. These were people who were becoming overwhelmed by the conditions of their lives and seeking an easy solution to their problems. They wanted a *theios-aner* to come in and make things right for them. As the writer looks at the contemporary scene, many similarities are observed. The conditions of life today are characterized as standing at "love-forty and match point." For many people the problems are becoming oppressive. Too often the response of church people is, to the writer's thinking, an avoidance of responsibility, a "cop-out." Unwilling to take responsibility for our own lives, we expect God to get us out of the problems that we individually or corporately have created. An often heard statement is, "Just pray about it and God will take care of it for you." To this writer the message of this passage is that even at "love-forty and match point" we are responsible for our own lives. We have a model in the life of Jesus, we have the guidance of the Holy Spirit, but we are responsible. The message of the Christian faith as interpreted for us by Mark is that even when things look the worst for us, we are called to give ourselves in service. The willingness to serve and suffer for others is the response we choose to give knowing that Jesus served us and suffered for us.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSION

The stated purpose of writing this project as outlined in the introduction is: (1) to establish a basis for understanding the messianic secret theme in the Gospel of Mark, and (2) using that basis to demonstrate how one might preach on the secret passages.

Chapters two and three accomplish the first goal. Chapter two outlines in detail the thought of William Wrede and presents the thought of fifteen scholars who have dealt with the concept of the secret. The chapter closes with a statement of the current status of the secret debate. The debate is not over. Major scholars have differing views as to the meaning of the secret, but it seems to this writer that the position of Weeden and Perrin is most worthy of consideration.

Mark is an author writing with a purpose. He has a message for his readers. For Mark the only appropriate response to the life of Jesus is a discipleship of service. Mark knows that one's Christology determines one's discipleship. His intent then is to present a theology of the cross as the mode for understanding the life and purpose of Jesus as the Christ. He uses the literary theme, the messianic secret, as a tool to promote his view. He establishes a Christology and calls for a corresponding discipleship.

Chapter three concerns itself with the relationship between the messianic secret theme and the theology of the cross. The secret

is shown to be a vehicle used by Mark to discredit a *theios-aner* understanding of Jesus. The church of Mark's day was enamored with a concept of Jesus that was very reassuring to them in a time of trouble, but to Mark's thinking was inaccurate. The secret is Mark's means of discrediting that false concept of Jesus.

However, Mark's main intention is more than attacking the *theios-aner* position. The traditional understanding of Mark's gospel as primarily concerned with the passion is most appropriate. Mark is most interested in affirming the suffering-servant nature of Jesus as the model for discipleship. Thus, the theology of the cross is the dominant theme of the gospel. The secret is used to subordinate one position of Jesus in order that another position might take prominence.

The second goal is accomplished in Chapters four and five. The fourth chapter explores the implications for preaching inherent in this understanding of the secret. In this chapter it is pointed out that questions such as the meaning and intention of the secret are questions of exegesis. An outline of the exegetical method is given and using the secret concept the reader is shown how this method is incorporated into the sermon preparation procedure. The similarities of life-situation in Mark's time and the present are discussed. The conclusion is reached that the message which Mark is attempting to spread by use of the secret and the theology of the cross has meaning for life in twentieth century western culture. Mark's word is a word for today.

Also considered in Chapter four is the nature of "whole gospel" preaching. The secret theme fits well into the grace, judgment, and obedience framework. The secret is Mark's tool for judging the thinking that denies the suffering-servant view of Jesus. Since the intention of Mark is to support the suffering-servant concept of Jesus, the understanding of grace becomes broad in scope and deep in meaning. As has been stated above, the clearest illustration of the quality of God's love is the life of service which we see in Jesus and is climaxed in his willing acceptance of death. Grace is the cross when understood as a symbol of Jesus' love for all mankind, a love so deep that he willed his life as an expression of loving concern for man. The element of obedience is most clear in relation to the secret theme. The only response open to the hearer of Mark's word, is a life of service. Mark affirms the suffering-servant Christology with such force that suffering-servant discipleship is the only appropriate response.

Chapter five is two sermons which the writer has prepared with the work of Chapters two through four as background. These two sermons are examples of taking the meaning of the secret and speaking the "word" to the contemporary scene.

The first of these sermons, "Mountains are for Listening," addresses the problem of inaction in the church. The approach is that the present-day church is much like Peter on the mount of transfiguration in that talk and institutional action are plentiful. However, what God wants of us is to listen to Jesus. God wants us to hear the life of our Lord, that life of self-less service, of suffering and

rejection. God wants us to hear Jesus' word for us, a word of service.

The second sermon is "Love-Forty and Match Point." Here the attempt is to deal with a prevalent problem in the church today. Among many people the attitude is strong that God is going to rescue us from all our problems. The expectation of a modern-day *theios-aner* is widespread. This sermon, based on the confession of Peter, seeks to demonstrate that the model given us in Jesus is one of service to others. Peter refused to accept Jesus' understanding of Messiahship because it was not the wonder-worker type. But Jesus stood firm in proclaiming his own understanding of who he was. To be the Christ is to suffer for others. To be a disciple of Christ is to live a life of self-less service. After each sermon are remarks that will enable the reader to understand more fully the writer's attempt.

The attempt of the dissertation, to understand the secret and to preach from that understanding, has been accomplished. What is presented here is a theological understanding of the concept of the messianic secret. Also presented is a process and two examples of how that theological understanding can become a "preaching word" for the church today.

The benefit to the writer is that the secret and all its many problematic facets are now more clearly in focus. But to this writer, more important than arriving at an understanding of the secret, is the perception that this concept which Mark used to speak to his own church has a message for the church today as well. It is not an easy word, for it challenges us and the discipleship we exhibit. However,

it is the gospel, the good news for us, for if we can hear it and live it we will have life and have it abundantly.

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